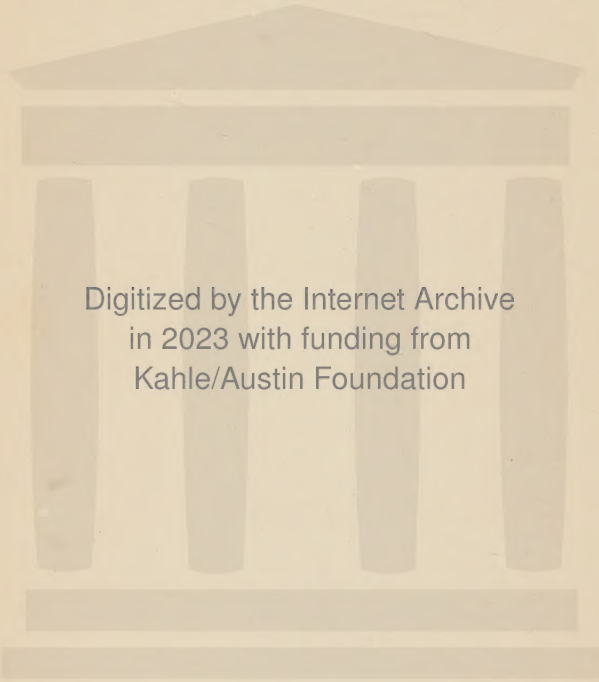






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# OUR LORD AND SAVIOUR

A STUDY OF THE PERSON AND  
DOCTRINE OF JESUS CHRIST

BY THE  
REV. PETER GREEN, M.A.

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CHAPLAIN TO H.M. THE KING

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IN GRATEFUL RECOGNITION  
OF ALL THEY HAVE TAUGHT ME



## PREFACE

I HOPE I have succeeded in making the aim and purpose of this book plain. I have no desire to supply anyone with ready-made conclusions about Jesus Christ. Rather I want to suggest methods by which my fellow-Christians, especially young people of both sexes, may form their own conclusions. And in this there seems to me to be three stages. They are (*a*) an attempt to gain, from the careful study of Holy Scripture, a mental picture of Jesus Christ which shall do justice to all aspects of His person and work; (*b*) an attempt to understand and interpret His teaching, both as He gave it in Galilee and Judea in the first century, and as we may believe He would give it to-day in our modern world; and (*c*) an attempt to apply that teaching so as to realize the life of discipleship here and now.

Such a preparation should lead, if what I believe about Jesus of Nazareth is true, to a personal knowledge of the living Christ when it shall please Him to grant it.

And when any man enjoys such personal knowledge of Jesus he is bound, it seems to me, to face the question "What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" He is bound, that is to say, to think out a theology. For what is theology but coherent thinking about God, and clearness and coherence in our thinking are not less, but rather more, necessary in our religion than in other spheres of life. All of us should strive to know "the certainty of those things wherein we have been instructed,"<sup>1</sup> and "to be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us."<sup>2</sup> And I believe, with all my heart and soul, that no other philosophy of life, no other view, that is to say, of life as a whole, can find room for all the facts of experience as Christianity can. We are

<sup>1</sup> Luke i. 4.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Peter iii. 15.

sometimes told that all "dogmatic systems" are repugnant to the modern mind, and that the religion of the future will be a creedless humanitarianism allied perhaps with spiritualism. I am so far from believing this that I am convinced the Church stands to-day with her feet on the threshold of a period of constructive dogmatic thinking comparable to the Alexandrine period or the Scholastic age. For God is the God of Truth, and the immense tracts of new knowledge in Natural Science, Psychology, Philosophy and History, which have been opened up during the last century, are God's Truth, and must be assimilated by the Church, and built into her dogmatic system. And I am sure that this can be done without the surrender of one of the articles of the creeds, and to the immense enrichment of the Church's stores of faith and devotion.

The first part of this book, Chapters I. to VI. inclusive, deals almost exclusively with what may be called experimental religion. Chapters VII. to X. deal with doctrine. Twice at least, when treating of the Virgin Birth in Chapter VII., and when dealing with the Resurrection in Chapter IX., I have had to touch on matters of textual and historical criticism. I feel that some reviewers will declare that "the author's attitude to the New Testament is quite uncritical." Against such a condemnation I would advance two pleas. Firstly, the uncritical attitude is that of a man who is either ignorant of the work of modern critics of the New Testament, or refuses to pay any attention to it. I cannot charge myself with either of these faults. Without making any claim to the title of critic myself I have tried to read New Testament criticism since I first became interested in it in 1898. And secondly, I would plead that textual and historic criticism are not ends in themselves: they are means to an end. And that end is to determine what measure of credence we may have in the sacred writings. If a man comes to no conclusions his criticism has failed him. There may, of course, be individual passages, individual events, about which he feels unable to arrive at any decision. But in that case, surely, he must refuse to use such passages or events for doctrinal or devotional purposes. I am sure that a man is not merely



permitted to criticise Holy Scripture with the same single-eyed regard to truth as he would employ in criticising any other books. He is morally bound to do so. And if he feels compelled to reject any considerable portions of the gospel narrative, the question whether he should still claim the name of Christian, or (if a clergyman) retain his Orders, is one purely for himself. It lies between his conscience and God. But what does seem to me intolerable is that a man should use in the pulpit, or in devotional moments, what he rejects as unhistorical in the study. A man's critical work must be done first; private devotion and public teaching must rest ultimately on things of the truth of which he has persuaded himself. In such a book as this it is not desirable, nor indeed possible, to weigh evidence, compare varying views, and discuss critical questions generally. I must work on the basis of such conclusions as I have myself arrived at. Now, my arguments in this book rest chiefly on three convictions. They are (i) That St. Luke wrote his gospel during St. Paul's period of imprisonment at Cæsarea, and, acting as a messenger between the imprisoned apostle and the Church at Jerusalem, had unrivalled opportunities for collecting his material at first-hand. (ii) That, whoever may have thrown our first gospel into its present shape, the discourse source used in it may reasonably be identified with the "Logia" mentioned by Papias; and that there is high probability that that apostle also left a record of the Nativity, as seen from St. Joseph's point of view, and of the Resurrection, as described by his mother, "Mary, the wife of Cleophas." If Matthew was indeed St. Joseph's nephew, such records would not improbably be preserved in the family. (iii) That, whoever may have been the author of the fourth gospel—and, personally, I believe it to have been John, the son of Zebedee, and utterly reject the so-called "red martyrdom of St. John"—it embodies the experiences of an eye-witness of the Crucifixion, who had an intimate knowledge of the topography of Jerusalem.

If these positions are accepted, even provisionally, the results of careful study of the gospel narratives seem to me to gain enormously in interest and significance.



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“WHENEVER Christianity has struck out a new path in her journey, it has been because the personality of Jesus has again become living, and a ray from His being has once more illuminated the world.”—BOUSSET.





## CHAPTER I

### WHAT IS CHRIST TO ME ?

THE subject of this book is Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour, and it seeks to discuss especially the personal relationship which should exist between the individual believer and his Lord. I shall not ignore the teaching of the Church about the nature and work of Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God. Indeed, it is my hope that this book may make that teaching more real to many plain people ; helping doubters to believe it, and simple Christian believers to understand it, and those who already understand it to make a more fruitful devotional use of its rich stores of spiritual truth. But I shall not start from that teaching. Rather I shall move in the opposite direction ; not starting from the creeds and dogmas of our faith, but working up to them. I shall first enquire how we may come to know Him, and to enter into a personal relationship to Him. Secondly, I shall discuss this personal knowledge of, and intimate relationship to, Jesus ; seeking to discover its nature, its effects on us, and the various stages of its growth. And, thirdly, I shall enquire what are the beliefs about Him which spring necessarily from our experience of the life of discipleship and communion with Christ.

And though this book is essentially a book for beginners, for "babes in Christ," and though my aim, at any rate in the greater part of it, will be to be as simple and as practical as possible, yet it is worth noticing that the method suggested above (if we find it possible to peruse it) is the method of all the sciences. A writer on astronomy, to take a concrete example, first discusses the methods by which knowledge of the stars may be obtained ; he describes the equatorial telescope, the spectroscope, stellar photography, the interferometer, etc. He then goes on to examine

and classify the knowledge so gained. And lastly, he tries to draw out a true "science of the stars," a coherent system of general laws as to their nature, origin, evolution and probable destiny. But what is theology but the "Science of God"? And that portion of theology which deals specially with Jesus Christ, and which is called Christology, must be, and as a matter of historical fact is, based on our experimental knowledge of Him. First, we have the knowledge of Him as He was when He walked the earth, which is recorded for us in the gospels. Then we have the records of all who have ever known and loved Him, recorded for us partly in Holy Scripture, but also in all Christian literature, in confessions, and biographies, and recorded prayers, and hymns. But we must add to all this, each one of us, our own knowledge and experience of Him. What the New Testament, and the writings of holy men of all ages, can teach us will help us to interpret our own experience. And our own experience, if it is full and rich, will in turn help to interpret and illuminate what we read.

Is not this the way in which all knowledge is gained? It would be a terrible thing if every student, whether of medicine, or of art, or of history, had to find out everything for himself without help from the learning of past generations. There could be no progress under such conditions. Yet knowledge which is mere book knowledge is of no value in anything. The medical student must not only read his text-books, he must "walk the hospitals"; the young artist, or the worker in history or economics, must not be content to copy in a studio or read in a library. Each must try to get into touch with his subject-matter, and must do some original work. Is it any different in religion? Do not we too need "experimental knowledge of Christ"?

I have been induced to write this book by many considerations. Perhaps the strongest of these is the growing conviction that many sincere Christians—or perhaps I ought to say many people who sincerely desire to be Christians—really know very little of their Lord and Saviour. They know about Him. But Him Himself they

do not know. Indeed, people, when speaking to me freely and without reserve about their spiritual difficulties, have often admitted and lamented this ignorance. It is not that they are troubled by any special intellectual doubts. It is not that they lack a sense of their own imperfections, or of their need of a Saviour. What they lament is that He seems to stand for so little in their lives. Their vision of Him is dim, clouded and uncertain. Any mental picture they have of Him seems derived rather from stained-glass windows in churches, and from memories of religious pictures and statues, than from personal knowledge or experience. They have little sense of His presence, or of His help and guidance, so that when preachers rank the knowledge of Christ's living presence with us as one of the proofs of the Resurrection they are either depressed, feeling that through some fault of their own they lack what most Christians possess, or else, and this is more dangerous still, they are sceptical and begin to suspect that what preachers say is not to be taken seriously, but is too often a mere form of words having little relation to actual reality. They feel that their love is cold and weak, and that so far from it being true that they could not live without Him, it is much more true to say that they have to make a continual effort to retain Him in their thoughts and lives. Why this should be we need not enquire here. It may be the fault of the clergy of all denominations. If Christ does not occupy His rightful place in the preacher's own life he will hardly be likely, "with great power," to give "witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus."<sup>1</sup> He will not, that is to say, help people to realize the presence of the Risen Christ in their own lives. Or again, the fault may not be with the ministry—though surely Christ might be more preached in our pulpits than He is, and we preachers might, with advantage, determine "not to know anything... save Jesus Christ and Him crucified"<sup>2</sup>—but the fault may be with the conditions of our lives. The rush, bustle, noise and racket of modern life does undoubtedly tell against the power of spiritual things. We live perpetually in the shallows of our emotional, intellectual and spiritual lives;

<sup>1</sup> Acts iv. 33.

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 2.

the depths remain unstirred. Or again, the cause may be something quite other than the things we have discussed. But this at least is certain. If there are many merely nominal Christians, men and women without vital experience of their Saviour, and of His love and power, it is not because He cannot be known nor because He does not desire to manifest Himself to us.

Here we touch my second reason for writing this book. I am deeply convinced that nothing is so much needed in the world to-day, alike for the happiness of the individual and the welfare of the State, and the safety of a distracted world, and (what is the real end and object of man's being, and of the whole creation) for the glory of God, as a great revival of religion. There was in all parts of the world, at the beginning of the century, clear evidence of a movement of God the Holy Ghost striving for a great religious awakening. In England, in America, in France, in Germany, in Russia, and doubtless in other countries of which I cannot speak, there was clear evidence that God the Holy Ghost was, as Eucken said, "blowing among the dead bones." And a writer<sup>3</sup> here in England wrote, "We are on the verge of a revival; an Epiphany is preparing." The fact that no great world revival came does not, in the very least, shake my conviction that God desired one, and tried for one, during the opening years of the century. Neither in the life of the individual, nor in the course of history, does God always get His way. His gracious purposes for man are often thwarted by man's faithlessness, stubbornness and sin. But I am quite sure that there was a great movement of the Holy Ghost during the opening decade of the new century. And I am quite sure that if a world revival had come there would have been no war. And I am deeply convinced that nothing but a great revival of religion can save the world from a further catastrophe in comparison with which all the horrors of the 1914-18 war will pale into insignificance. Now there are, it seems to me, two things, and two things only, which can lead to such a revival, namely, a great deal more, and more intense, prayer and a fresh vision of our Lord and Saviour. If the Church desires

<sup>3</sup> Dr Percy Dearmer in his book *Soul and Body*.

"times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord"<sup>4</sup> her twofold prayer to God should be "Lord, teach us to pray,"<sup>5</sup> and "We would see Jesus."<sup>6</sup> A clear vision of Jesus, leading to a new self-dedication to service and discipleship, is what every individual Christian must seek if we are to have the sort of religion which alone is adequate for the solution of the problems with which both the Church and the State are confronted to-day.

But there is something else involved besides the welfare of the Church or the State. There is the happiness of the individual. If there is one thing to which every class of Christian literature bears witness, it is that, from the very first, from the day when St. Paul wrote, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain,"<sup>7</sup> or St. John penned the words, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, Whom Thou has sent,"<sup>8</sup> down to the present moment, there have been untold thousands for whom the personal relationship of love, loyalty, dependence and discipleship to their Saviour has been the greatest thing in life. Nay, more; it has been more than the greatest, more than all others put together, since it has in some wonderful way summed up and included all life's other goods. As, when the grain of mustard seed becomes a tree, the birds of the air come and lodge in its branches,<sup>9</sup> so when religion attains its full development as a personal relationship between the soul and Christ all the varied goods of this world, the simple pleasures of daily life, the grace and beauty of little children, the goodness of ordinary men and women, the joys of social intercourse, the love of friends, in a word all knowledge, truth and beauty, are caught up into our religion and there transmuted into something new and wonderful. Surely it is some such experience as this that St. Paul is referring to when he says, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new."<sup>10</sup> It is not merely that the man is altered; all things are altered and gain a new significance. This, of course, is the case with

<sup>4</sup> Acts iii. 19.<sup>5</sup> Luke xi. 1.<sup>6</sup> John xiv. 21.<sup>7</sup> Phil. i. 21.<sup>8</sup> John xvii. 3.<sup>9</sup> Matt. xiii. 32.<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

every great emotional experience. The Bishop of London used to tell a story of an East London lad who, falling in love and being accepted by the girl, exclaimed as he walked down the Commercial Road, "And I used to think Stepney an ugly place!" If human love can so transmute the things of daily life, and gild the most sordid surroundings—and no one should dare to speak lightly of a young man's love for the girl he hopes to make his wife—what cannot love do when its object is Him in Whom "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily"?<sup>11</sup> What that love for Christ, and the "knowledge of His love, which passeth knowledge,"<sup>12</sup> has meant for thousands is witnessed to by all the hymn-writers and religious poets. But it is more than joy and happiness. It is also power, fulness of life—

When I myself did seek,  
And to myself would live,  
How poor was I! How weak!  
Life had no boon to give  
To me, a captive bird confined  
In the dull cage of my own mind.

There was no joy in life,  
Nor any warmth nor light;  
Each day a fruitless strife,  
Blank weariness each night.  
A slave was I, whom none might free  
From my own cruel tyranny.

But when my sole desire  
Was to be used by Thee;  
Consumed, as in a fire,  
Or, in the boundless sea  
Of Thine unending Being lost,  
A pebble in th' Atlantic toss'd.

Straightway my soul did find  
Herself, and all her powers;  
My conquering spirit bind  
And rule the captive hours;  
And the whole world submissive bring  
Tribute to me, her Lord and King.

<sup>11</sup> Col. ii. 9.

<sup>12</sup> Eph. iii. 19.



And we find the same note of the consciousness of our weakness made strength in Him, expressed as only Charles Wesley could express it, in the concluding verses of his wonderful poem, "Come, O Thou Traveller unknown"—

Contented now upon my thigh  
I halt, till life's short journey end ;  
All helplessness, all weakness, I  
On Thee alone for strength depend ;  
Nor have I power from Thee to move ;  
Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love.

Lame as I am, I take the prey,  
Hell, earth and sin, with ease o'ercome ;  
I leap for joy, pursue my way,  
And as a bounding hart fly home !  
Through all eternity to prove,  
Thy Nature and Thy Name is Love.

Indeed, if anyone is ever tempted to give credence, even for a moment, to the belief so often expressed by worldly-minded people and those destitute of religious experience, that religion is a sad, depressing, unhappy business, a giving up of all joy, an impoverishment of life, let him spend half an hour with such a book as *The Book of Praise*, in which the late Roundell Palmer collected for the *Golden Treasury Series* the best of English religious poetry, and he will learn from those who speak from experience—and surely they ought to know—that he is wrong. And when we remember that for one Christian poet able to express his soul's experiences in imperishable verse, there are ten thousand humble worshippers whose joy is known only to themselves and their Saviour, we shall, indeed, believe that He came that we "might have life, and have it more abundantly."<sup>13</sup>

But while we recognise that there is this great crowd of witnesses to the fact that Jesus can be known as a living, ever-present Saviour and Friend, and to the fact that this knowledge is, indeed, "life eternal," we need to recognize another thing. To many people who have not had, as yet,

<sup>13</sup> John x. 10.

any real first-hand experience of their Saviour's nearness and love, the raptures of religious poets are depressing rather than heartening, causes of doubt and of sadness rather than of gladness and assurance. I can speak here with confidence, for I speak of what I have myself experienced. When I was quite a small boy, certainly under thirteen and possibly younger, I was taken to a mission, and I heard the line of the well-known mission hymn that runs—

And Jesus shall show you His beautiful face.

I was completely repelled. I knew that the line corresponded to nothing in my own experience, and with the youthful arrogance which is, I think, common to children, I did not believe that it corresponded with anything anyone else felt or could feel. I do not think the incident did me any permanent harm. But certainly I was, so to speak, "put off" that particular type of religious emotion for a long time. And even much later in my young days, such hymns as, "How sweet the Name of Jesus sounds," "Jesu, the very thought of Thee," "Jesu, lover of my Soul," and others of that kind, gave me more pain than pleasure. I do not think this can be explained by saying that young people are repelled by anything sentimental. For I very much doubt if that is true. Rather I believe that the recognized "hardness" of youth—and many children and young people are very hard—is balanced by an equally pronounced sentimentality. No, I believe I am right when I say the discomfort that these and similar hymns produced in me was due to the half-unconscious thought, "If this emotion is not genuine and real in those who express it all religion is hypocrisy; and if it is genuine and real, then religious people possess something to which I am an utter stranger; something to which I see no means of attaining." And I believe that something of this feeling is common to many Christian people, and especially to many young people. The object, then, of this book is to help such people by showing them how to attain that knowledge of Jesus that they desire. Of course, in a sense, this knowledge cannot be taught, because religion is the most intensely personal and

individual thing in the world, so that no two souls come to Jesus in quite the same way. The Hindoo saying that, "There are as many paths to the feet of the One as there are souls to tread those paths," is profoundly true. And the knowledge of Jesus cannot be taught because He reveals Himself when and how He will. But if the soul's history of no two people is quite alike, nevertheless there are resemblances in the broad outlines. It is possible to formulate "natural laws in the spiritual world," and so we can learn from one another. And though He reveals Himself to whom He will, and when and how He wills, there is nothing arbitrary, no trace of favouritism in His dealings with men, for He died for all alike. Judas, not Iscariot, asked Jesus, "Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us and not unto the world?" Our Lord's answer is, "If a man love Me he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him."<sup>14</sup> Love, and obedience; these are the qualifications for the knowledge of Jesus. If we desire Him to manifest Himself to us we must strive to qualify for such a privilege. There is no question of merit in the matter. It is the free, unforced, undeserved gift of God. But the other side of the truth is equally important. We must prepare ourselves to receive so great a gift. And in seeking so to prepare ourself we need to remember that the only real qualification for seeing Jesus is the desire to see Him. I had that impressed on me from an unexpected quarter a few days before writing this paragraph. In Lent the children of our two elementary schools in this parish come to church for a special service each Wednesday, from 11.25 a.m. to 12 noon. On the Wednesday in Holy Week the subject was, "The Captain of our salvation." I quoted the question of St. Jude to Christ, and then said, "Children, why doesn't Jesus 'Treat us all alike,' as the saying goes? Why does He show Himself to some and not to others?" I hardly expected an answer, but a boy of about thirteen put his hand up at once. "Please sir," he said, "He shows Himself to those who *want* to see Him." A wonderful answer, surely. And so entirely true. "For whosoever

<sup>14</sup> John xiv. 22-23.

hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath." <sup>15</sup> Can the reader say that he hath ? Has he at anyrate two things, the desire to know Jesus, and the willingness to work and strive and pray for that knowledge ? If so, it shall be his.

'Tis all in vain to hold Thy tongue,  
Or touch the hollow of my thigh ;  
Though every sinew be unstrung,  
Out of my arms Thou shalt not fly ;  
Wrestling, I will not let Thee go,  
Till I Thy Name, Thy Nature know.

<sup>15</sup> Matt. xiii. 12.

## CHAPTER II

### THE THREEFOLD PATH TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

#### (i) *Vision*

WE must now address ourselves to the task mentioned at the end of the last chapter. What is this preparation for the knowledge of Jesus? How can we train ourselves that He may be able to reveal Himself?

Now clearly we cannot expect this to be a short and easy task. No one would set out to master a foreign language, or to learn to play a musical instrument, who was not willing to devote some time and effort to the work, and to bring to it enthusiasm and perseverance. What, then, may we expect when the task is nothing less than "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ"?<sup>1</sup> Yet I would not wish to alarm or discourage anyone. The task is a great one; but it is well within the powers of everybody. Some time ago a friend wrote to me and said, "Your conception of religion is all very well for clever and highly-educated people with plenty of leisure. But what of poor, ignorant, simple people with their living to earn? Are they to be shut out of the Kingdom of Heaven?" My friend was wrong. All my ministerial life has been spent among the very poorest and least educated classes in big cities, in London, Leeds and Manchester. And I say, without hesitation, that intellect, and learning, and culture, and wealth, and leisure, have nothing whatever to do with true holiness, true sanctification. All these things, like their opposites, simplicity, ignorance, lack of culture, poverty, and the burden of toil, are opportunities for serving God. They have their good and their evil side, their dangers and their blessings. But one social class, if I may judge from my own experience, produces no more saints, and no fewer, than

<sup>1</sup> 2 Cor. iv. 6.

another. When St. Paul wrote, "Art thou called being a slave? Care nor for it; but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's slave,"<sup>2</sup> he was not laying down any law as to the moral and social character of slave-holding. He was stating a profound truth of the spiritual life that the knowledge and love of Christ is open to all without distinction of personal endowment or social position. But if brains and learning and culture are not required, perseverance, and the love which will not be denied, are. Unless the reader is ready for some hard work he had better read no further.

How shall we know Jesus? Well, first of all there is the record of Him in the New Testament. I want to make my point clear, so I will take an example. Are you a student of Shakespeare? If not, you do not know King Lear. Oh! you may have heard of him, and have a general idea of the story. But you only *know of him*; you do not *know him*. You have not traced the development of the kind, hearty, boisterous old man of the first scene till he becomes one of the greatest tragic figures of all time. But if you have read and re-read, studied and re-studied the play, you have your own conception of the character. If you see a great actor in the part you may say, "Yes, that was wonderful, and moving, and consistent. But it was not my conception of the man. It was not the Lear I know." Apply this comparison to Christ—and I am sure it can be so applied without irreverence—and my point will be clear. Do you really know the gospel story at first hand, or is your knowledge of it, like so many people's knowledge of Shakespeare, something picked up casually from memories of school lessons, and from chance passages heard in church or met with in books, and from the atmosphere of the society in which you live? And have you your own conception of Christ? If you see a new picture of Him, or read some new book, or hear an eloquent sermon about Him, do you say, "Striking, no doubt; wonderful, and in its way, attractive; but not my conception of Jesus?" Or here too are you only at second hand? If so, clearly the first thing to do is to make

<sup>2</sup> 1 Cor. vii. 21, 22.



a fresh study of Him in the gospels. But here we are confronted with a very real difficulty. We have all heard the story so often ; we have, alas, so often read it carelessly and hurriedly, that it has ceased altogether to grip us. We find it difficult to keep our attention fixed. But I have a suggestion to make. And perhaps I had better tell the whole story which shows how that suggestion originated. At Cambridge, as soon as I went up, I came under the influence of a second year man, a man that is to say a year senior to me, called G. H. Russell Garcia. He afterwards became a Congregational minister at Sunderland, and died young after doing a great and outstanding, but too short, work there. He was a man of striking appearance, but his character was more striking than his appearance. I have never known a man with such powers of memory ; he was widely read in English literature ; he had an omnivorous appetite for books on any and all subjects, and a strangely original outlook on life. Perhaps I idealize his memory. But certainly during my first two years at St. John's College, the only two during which he was up, I followed him, and admired him, and made a hero of him, as young men will of a striking and attractive senior. One day he suddenly said to me, apropos of nothing in the conversation we had been having, "Green, you were brought up in a religious home. Well! how would you like to read the gospels for the first time to-day? If you came to them fresh at the age of twenty, what effect would they have on you? Would you believe them? And what effect would the central figure have on you? Would Jesus attract you, or repel you?" At the time the question merely gave me a nasty jolt. But I never forgot it. And many years after I was led by it to make an experiment. It must have been at least ten years after I was ordained, and I was going from Manchester to Euston on an express train. No sooner had the train started than I realized that I had brought no book or paper to read. And then Garcia's remark came into my mind. So I took out my pocket Testament and decided to read one of the gospels straight through, and to do it, as far as possible, as if I had never read it before. Of course, it is not possible entirely to get rid of the associa-

tions and presuppositions of a lifetime. But let the reader try the experiment. I think that, for many reasons, St. Mark's gospel is the best on which to begin. Let the reader take it, and read it straight through, if possible at a sitting, and try to read it as if some friend had said, "Have you heard of this new Eastern teacher? Here is a book about him. I wish you would read it and tell me what you make of it." Try to put away for the time being all previous ideas, all preconceived conceptions of His nature or character. Try to "see Jesus" as he is drawn for us in the gospel. It may possibly be a help to some to read the gospel in a new translation, such for instance as Dr Moffatt's. Or even, if the reader knows any foreign language, to read it in French or German. But even if it is read in the Authorized Version, it is marvellous how the figure of Jesus stands out with a new distinctness and a new grip on one's mind, as a result of reading the gospel story straight through, with an open mind, and without any purpose except to see what the writer of the gospel really does say.

When one has thus read a selected gospel there is no need to be in a hurry. Rather it may be better to read it again, perhaps several times, and to meditate on it. Let the new figure of Christ have time to impress itself on your mind. Each time you re-read either the whole gospel or some part of it some fresh detail will strike you, and each of these details will add something to the vividness and fulness, the concreteness and reality, of the figure. But sooner or later you must go on to the other gospels. St. Luke and St. Matthew not merely have their own beauties, and their own outlook on life, but also their distinct contributions to the fulness of Christ. And that is even more true of St. John's gospel. Of course, there may be details which you cannot work into your conception of Christ. Here and there you may find things you can't assimilate. Then do not try to. Be honest with yourself. Honesty is the first of all requisites in such a study as we are engaged in. There is no need to deny or reject what we cannot understand. It is enough to recognize that we do not understand it, and so cannot use it in building up our picture of our Saviour. It is material to be laid by; it may come

in useful later on. Nor need we be distressed at such failure to understand. Do we understand all sides of a great character, even a purely human character, at once, and after one meeting? At Cambridge there was one of the professors who went out of his way to show me kindness, and to help me in my work. Being privileged to go often to his rooms I came to form a very high opinion of the man, and both to respect and love him. But there was one of his interests and enthusiasms, and one set of his opinions, neither of which I could in any way understand nor account for. There was nothing wrong or even undignified in either. It was simply that neither seemed to harmonize with the rest of his character. They consorted with his other interests and beliefs as a pearl necklace would with a private's suit of khaki, or a pair of hobnail boots with a lady's ball-dress. And then, on a visit to Cambridge some time after I had gone down, some chance remark of his made everything clear. So I realized that he was a much greater, as well as a more complex and interesting, personality than I had ever dreamed. In making room in my conception of his character for these details, this hitherto unused material, I had greatly to enlarge that conception. May it not be so with us and the Man Christ Jesus?<sup>3</sup> For, obviously, it is not going to be an easy task to harmonize, and fuse into a single consistent whole, all the aspects of the God-Man which the various books of the Bible, and the wide range of Christian literature, present to us. For if we want to be loyal to truth, if we want at any rate to try to give due weight to all the evidence, we must not pick and choose what we like. We must find room in our hearts and minds not only for Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth, taking little children into His arms and blessing them,<sup>4</sup> or saying to the woman taken in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee. Go and sin no more,"<sup>5</sup> but for the Christ of St. John's vision in Patmos, the Christ in Whose right hand are the seven stars, and out of Whose mouth goes the sharp two-edged sword, and Whose countenance is as the sun shining in its strength.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>3</sup> 1 Tim. ii. 5.

<sup>5</sup> John viii. 11.

<sup>4</sup> Mark x. 13-16.

<sup>6</sup> Rev. i. 16.

And along with Jesus of Nazareth, and Jesus on the Cross, and Jesus ascended and reigning in glory, we must think of the Cosmic Christ, Him of Whom St. John writes that, "All things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made. . . He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not,"<sup>7</sup> and Him of Whom St. Paul writes, when, looking not back to the beginning of things, the Alpha, like St. John, but on to the consummation of all things, the Omega, he says God will "in the dispensation of the fulness of times . . . gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth; even in Him, in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance."<sup>8</sup> And then there is the Christ of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the great High Priest, entered within the veil, Who ever liveth to make intercessions for us,<sup>9</sup> and Christ Who meets us sacramentally at the Altar, and Christ Who is with us, spiritually, where two or three are gathered together. All these various aspects of Christ are elements out of which the single image of our Lord and Saviour is to be built up. It is possible that some of us may not be able to find room for all. But if any are omitted the figure will be to a greater or less extent impoverished.

Of course, some people may say that they do not wish to include all these various aspects of Christ's nature and work in their picture of Him. Jesus, the Prophet of Nazareth, "Who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him,"<sup>10</sup> is enough for them. His gracious figure seems to them to have been overlaid and obscured by the theological additions of later years. For instance, a young university undergraduate said to me, some years ago, "I do not want to think of Jesus as my Saviour. I want Him as a pal, a companion, a leader." What shall we say of such a remark? Well, if I could be quite sure that it represented a genuine attitude of mind I should rejoice in it. For it would represent something real and alive. And anything real and living, however immature and undeveloped, may, and if

<sup>7</sup> John i. 3 and 10.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. vi. 19 and 20 and Heb. vii. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Eph. i. 10.

<sup>10</sup> Acts x. 38.

it lives probably will, grow into a perfectly developed organism. We don't lament in March that the field shows no more than a tiny green shoot of wheat. No, we welcome any sign of life, saying, "First the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear."<sup>11</sup> But I confess something in the wording of the sentence made me suspicious that it was more of a pose than a reality. And to feel no sense of sin, and recognize no need of a Saviour, does certainly argue a rather shallow religious life. And there is a certain youthful arrogance in this brushing aside of what has meant so much to generations of saints and heroes and mystics. What would be said of a professed student of English literature who declared, "I do not want to hear of the Shakespeare of the Sonnets. Shakespeare as a lover fails to appeal to me. I don't intend to study the tragedies. Hamlet, and Lear, and poor tortured Othello, and Macbeth, driven by the Fates down his appointed path, and the rest of Shakespeare's tragic figures, don't interest me. All the wealth of character drawing, all the rich humanity of the comedies, I put aside. I want Shakespeare only as one who will make English history real for me?" How much more, with how much deeper cause, should we reject the attitude of mind to which one aspect only of the "unsearchable riches of Christ"<sup>12</sup> makes any appeal!

Yet it cannot be denied that this desire to get back to the historic Christ, to the Man Christ Jesus, to Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth, is very common and wide-spread to-day, and does often show itself in the form of irritation at, and impatience with, other forms of devotion to Him. But for any common and widespread attitude of mind there is always a reason, and usually a sound and good reason. What is the reason here? I believe it is the perfectly sound instinct which teaches people that they must first see Jesus as He was manifested to men during His time on earth, and only from that can go on to other aspects of Christ's nature and work. Reverse that order of development, come first to the Christ of theology, or of mystical experience, or of the sacraments, and progress will be slow and difficult. Omit the Jesus of the gospels altogether, and

<sup>11</sup> Mark iv. 29.

<sup>12</sup> Eph. iii. 8.



harm, often fatal harm, is the result. A good many years ago I heard a leader of the Evangelical school of thought in the Church of England, who has since been raised to the episcopate, declare that so far from opposing he would welcome a daily celebration of Holy Communion provided he could be certain that it would not deprive the faithful, and especially the clergy, of their daily hour of prayerful study of Holy Scripture in their own studies. And very soon after I read an address by one of the leaders of the Anglo-Catholic school, in which he warned his hearers that no regularity of attendance at the Holy Eucharist, nor any reality of His Presence there, could compensate for failure to see Him as depicted for us in the gospels. Christ in the Blessed Sacrament, he declared, could feed souls. Only the gospels could teach, instruct and enlighten those souls about Him. So both of these teachers, speaking doubtless from their own souls' experience, though approaching the subject from different sides, gave the same advice. Try first to "see Jesus" in the gospel story. Nor need we be afraid. If we once get a true vision of the Jesus of the gospels we shall not be likely, indeed we shall not be able, to stop there. We shall be forced onward and onward to a fuller and fuller conception of Him. The author of that remarkable book, *The Anatomy of Science*,<sup>13</sup> points out that "the two geometries which were published independently, and almost simultaneously, one by the Russian Lobachevski, and the other by the Hungarian Bolyai, were so nearly alike that they seem like different drafts of the same composition. Similarly Hamilton and Grassman wrote at the same time those papers which were to become the foundation of modern vector analysis." In natural science we have many such coincidences: Adams and Le Verrier, and the discovery of the planet Neptune, in astronomy; Mendelejeff and Lothar Meyer, and the Periodic Law, in chemistry; Darwin and Wallace, and the survival of the fittest, in biology. Professor Lewis attributes the coincidences in mathematics to two causes. The first is that there is an "objective world of mathematics," so

<sup>13</sup> *The Anatomy of Science*, by G. N. Lewis. Oxford University Press, 1926. p. 41.

that "we cannot avoid the thought that having embarked upon a certain line of mathematical enquiry, while we appear to have preserved the utmost of personal freedom, we seem bound to follow certain paths and to make and remake certain discoveries, just as we do in physics and chemistry." And the second is that thought is not under our control; it is "a prolific growth which we can neither start nor stop," so that when a particular train of thought has once commenced in our minds it will carry us not where we want it to but to conclusions determined by logic and by fact. But is there not a real world, an "objective universe" of religious experience as real as the world from which we glean the data of our astronomy and chemistry and biology? Is not that spiritual world of religion not merely as real as, but far more real and lasting than, the merely physical universe? So I am convinced that if we start a train of thought about Jesus of Nazareth, we too shall be "bound to follow certain paths, and to make and remake certain discoveries," so that we shall find ourselves following the path trodden by the saints and doctors and mystics of all ages, and arriving, almost independently, at the same conclusions as they about the Eternal Christ.

But the first step is to gain a clear vision of Jesus. And though no two souls will tread exactly the same path, yet, speaking generally, we may say that the following will be the best order of procedure.

Read St. Mark's gospel straight through, if you can at a single sitting, and possibly several times, with a mind as free as may be from all presuppositions and second-hand opinions. Try merely to "Behold the Man," as the evangelist depicts Him for us. And let the impression sink in and dominate your thoughts and imaginations.

When you have a clear picture of Jesus before your mind read the other gospels, first St. Matthew's and St. Luke's, and afterwards St. John's, and let what they supply fill out, and modify, the portrait. It will be interesting to see how the picture of Jesus, the young prophet of Nazareth, passes naturally, inevitably, into the Man of Sorrows of Gethsemane and of Calvary, and again how the Man of Sorrows

becomes the Risen Christ Who can say, "All power is given unto Me in Heaven and in earth."<sup>14</sup>

From the thought of Christ during His life on earth the transition is natural to the thought of the Ascended and Glorified Christ. We shall have to meditate on :—

- (i) The Christ of the Book of the Revelation of St. John.
- (ii) The Christ of the Epistle to the Hebrews, the Great High Priest standing, like a Priest before the Altar, before the Father's throne in Heaven, making intercessions for us.
- (iii) The Christ Who, just because He goes away from the earth, can say, "I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you";<sup>15</sup> the Christ, that is to say, Who is present by His Holy Spirit in every sanctified heart and in every place where two or three are gathered together.<sup>16</sup>
- (iv) The Mystic Christ, the Christ within, Who is "formed in you,"<sup>17</sup> and Who comes to His completeness in your life and mine, when we can say, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."<sup>18</sup>

And in turn the various aspects of the Incarnate Son of God, Glorified and Ascended, will prepare the way for our acceptance—I hardly dare to write, *our understanding*—of the Cosmic Christ, the Logos, Who was in the beginning with God, Who was God, by Whom all things were made, Who, in coming to us and taking our nature upon Him, came to His own, and took what had been created in His likeness. And from the Alpha we shall look on the Omega, the consummation of all things, in Whom we shall all be one even as He and the Father are One,<sup>19</sup> when God's great scheme of Salvation is complete, and the ruin of the Fall is undone, and all things are restored to unity in Him "in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance."<sup>20</sup>

<sup>14</sup> St. Matt. xxviii. 18.      <sup>15</sup> John xiv. 18.      <sup>16</sup> St. Matt. xviii. 20.

<sup>17</sup> Gal. iv. 19.      <sup>18</sup> Gal. ii. 20.      <sup>19</sup> John xvii. 21.      <sup>20</sup> Eph. i. 10.



## CHAPTER III

### THE THREEFOLD PATH TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

#### (ii) *Understanding*

THE process described in the last chapter is a long one. Indeed, it is quite literally true to say that the whole of life will not be too long for the task. So there is no need for hurry. The soul must not be forced nor harried nor oppressed. What is desired is natural unforced growth. Only that belief is worth having of which one can truly say, "I can't help believing. No other view is, to me at any rate, possible." Sincerity in religion is not only the chief of all virtues; it is the one without which no other virtues can exist. At the present time I number among my friends one whom I have known since he was ten years old. I have watched him develop, and should to-day rank him, intellectually, morally and spiritually, among the finest characters I know. And I attribute this very largely to his intense intellectual honesty. He has always had too much sense, and too true a modesty, to go about noisily denying the doctrines of Christianity. On the other hand he has always steadily refused to put his foot down an inch further than he was ready to go, or to assert belief in advance of the stage to which he felt he had attained. To practice diligently what he was certain of, and to wait for further light, has been his rule. "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good,"<sup>1</sup> seems to have been his motto. So to-day he not merely has a vivid faith in Christ, but has that faith at once securely grounded on experience and so well thought out that he is able to help others. "Go slow," is a good motto in religion as in many other things. If at times we are depressed at the slowness of our progress, let us remember that Christ Himself said, "I have yet

<sup>1</sup> *Thess. v. 21.*

many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now. Howbeit when He, the Spirit of Truth, is come, He will guide you into all truth.”<sup>2</sup>

But while we recognize that the attainment of a clear vision of our Saviour is a lengthy business, we must recognize also that it is not the whole of the task to which we have addressed ourselves, the task namely of coming to the knowledge of Jesus. With vision must go understanding. I call this the second element, but no one will suppose that the two parts of the task are separated one from the other in such a way that the first must be completed before the second is attempted. They must go on together, each helping and stimulating the other.

Now this effort at interpreting Jesus is itself a twofold task. We need to understand Him, to seek to enter into His mind so as to see not merely what He does but why He does it, to recognize His motives in all the situations in which the gospels show Him to us. But we must not merely do this. We must try to re-interpret Him in terms of our own day and age. Our vision must be not merely a vision of what He was in Judea or in Galilee in the first century. It must aim at being also a vision of what He would be to-day if He came to dwell on earth again in London, or Paris, or Manchester, in a Cornish fishing village, or a Lancashire colliery town, in the twentieth century. How can this be done?

Let us look at the first part first. How may we understand Jesus as He was during His time on earth? Now, here I am confronted with a difficulty. Any interpretations I offer will obviously be my interpretations. But what the reader wants is not my interpretations but his own. Yet, unless I am going to try to offer some help to my readers, what is the object of writing this book at all? I may perhaps succeed in striking the happy mean between saying too much and leaving too much unsaid if I indicate the principle on which we should act, and illustrate it by one or two examples. The principle by which we must interpret the Incarnate Christ is, I am sure, the recognition of His perfect humanity. As the “Confession of our Christian

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 12 and 13.

Faith, commonly called The Creed of Saint Athanasius," most truly teaches, He is not merely "God, of the Substance of the Father, begotten before the world," but also "Man, of the Substance of His Mother, born in the world." He is Perfect Man as truly as Perfect God. And when people, from a jealous zeal for His honour, exalt His divinity *at the expense* of His humanity, I am sure they do untold harm. I would quote here some wise words by Dr. R. G. Parsons, Bishop of Middleton: "Orthodox religious teachers have been so anxiously occupied in safeguarding the Divinity of Christ that they have almost forgotten His Humanity: I would urge them to make sure of the Humanity, and the Divinity will make sure of itself."<sup>3</sup> So let us recognise to the full the humanity of Jesus. Then we can illustrate His actions by the actions of ordinary men and women whom we know, or of whom we read in books. Simple minded and devout people are often shocked when parallels are drawn between Christ's actions and ways of thought and those of ordinary people. Now, while it is true that His ways are higher than our ways, and His thought than our thoughts, yet there must be something in common between Him and us or He would not be truly Human, and it must be possible to draw those parallels, or He would not be our Pattern and Example. Indeed, we may perhaps recognize this hesitation to compare our Lord's standards of thinking and acting with those of common men as one of the reasons why the Church as a whole has made so little progress in her "Imitation of Christ." So, in reading the gospels, and, indeed, all the New Testament, let us freely draw on life and literature for illustrations and helps. Some time ago I said<sup>4</sup> that I divided the narratives of the Bible into four classes, as follows:—

- (i) Those things of which I could say, "I know this is true, for God has treated me in the same way."
- (ii) Those of which I could say, "I know this is true,

<sup>3</sup> "Jesus: Human and Divine." A paper read at the Modern Churchman's Conference, 1921.

<sup>4</sup> *Personal Religion and Public Righteousness*, Longmans, 1923. p. 38.

for though I personally have never had such an experience, I know people who have."

- (iii) Those of which I could say, "I believe this to be true, for though I have never met with such a case, I know enough of human nature, and of God's ways with man, to see that it is natural and suitable."
- (iv) Those of which I have had to say, "This I do not understand. It corresponds with nothing in my own experience, nor in the experience of those I have talked with."

Must we not use the same key in seeking to understand the mind of Christ? He is, in the fullest sense, the "Son of Man." And He is also "Perfect Man"; not merely sinless, but complete, so that all human nature is gathered up and displayed in Him. It is too early in the order of our argument to justify this claim. I hope we shall be able to do so later (pp. 80-82). But I have long been convinced that just as St. Paul says, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily,"<sup>5</sup> so we may truly assert that, "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of human nature bodily." So then we must seek to understand Christ in the light of His perfect and complete Humanity. His experience will be deeper, fuller, richer than ours; but it will be, so to speak, of the same stuff. Things will be possible for Him, alike in the physical and in the moral sphere, which we cannot as yet attain to. But even His mightiest works will be done as Man, done rather in the power of His complete and sinless manhood than in the power of His deity.

Let me try, in one or two instances, to apply this key. It is quite impossible to believe that when Jesus lay upon His Mother's breast, as an infant of a few months old, He knew Himself to be God. It is all but impossible to believe that He had that knowledge when he was a boy of ten or twelve. Nor need we believe so. For Holy Scripture asserts that He "*increased* in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."<sup>6</sup> Can we then form any idea of how and when Jesus came to the full realization of His Nature and His Task; and can we picture, with any probability,

<sup>5</sup> Col. ii. 9.

<sup>6</sup> Luke ii. 52.

what His mental development was before that realization? Surely the moment when He first realized to the full Who He was, and what His life's task was to be, was at His Baptism when He heard a voice from Heaven, "Thou art My Beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased."<sup>7</sup> What then would be Christ's attitude of mind as a boy? It always seems to me that the distinctive marks of a young boy's religious outlook are great sensitiveness of conscience and a real consciousness of God. The highest forms of mystical experience do not, I believe, occur for most people till they are eighteen or twenty, or more commonly later still. But real tenderness of conscience, a natural recognition of and love for goodness and purity, and a quick perception of and shrinking from evil, are found in many, though not, of course, all, boys and girls. And along with this often goes a certain sense—perhaps the thing I want to describe might best be expressed in the words "a certain comforting sense"—of God's nearness and love and protection. This view of what childish religious experience consists of is the result of many years' work with children, and is founded on a great many slight indications rather than on any specially striking examples. But one example of each trait may be quoted. When I was an undergraduate, I and a number of other men and some ladies, members of my host's family and of another family of neighbours, were talking in the smoking-room one evening in the Easter vacation. The talk turned on questions of right and wrong, of the opportunity or lack of opportunity of a good life for children born in the slums, of hereditary taints, of free-will and determinism, and of similar matters likely to interest young people. Suddenly the youngest son of the house, a boy not quite thirteen, whom I think we had all forgotten, struck in. He said, "You know, Mr Green, that's all rot. Any decent fellow knows what's right and what's wrong; and can do right if he chooses." No doubt there was much of the crudeness and cocksureness of youth in the dictum. Yet I am sure that it did really represent his own soul's experience. For I knew him well for many years, and could thoroughly endorse what his house-master said of him to

<sup>7</sup> Mark i. 11.



me many years after, "The cleanest and most right-minded boy I ever had under me." And I have often noted and commented on the same quality, in greater or lesser degree, in boys and girls of all classes. This clear voice of conscience too often gets stilled as life advances, but among young people in all classes, and quite independently of the character of home teaching or influence, we find it, and it "shows the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another."<sup>8</sup> I have drawn my first illustration from a boy brought up in a good home, a member of what may be called the upper middle classes. I will take my next, an example of "joy in God," from the poorest class of casual labourers, and from a thoroughly bad home. A boy of just thirteen presented himself, quite on his own initiative, at the Confirmation Classes one year. One day he said to me, "It's strange how happy I've been since I took to saying my prayers. Sometimes when I am praying I feel as if God were leaning out of Heaven and putting His hand on my head. Of course, I don't always feel like that." Here, again, I am sure the experience was a real and genuine one. And I did not know which to admire most, the boy's unusual awakesness to spiritual things or the mental honesty which made him anxious not to claim more than was true.

Take these two elements, an enlightened conscience and a comforting sense of our Heavenly Father's nearness and love. Raise them to the highest power the mind can conceive of; and think of them not as passing experiences, of which one has to say, "Of course, I don't always feel like that," but as an abiding condition and habit of mind, and have we not some faint picture of the mind of the boy Jesus? He must have known, very early, that He was not altogether like other boys. He must have realized, long before He came to John's baptism, that God was His Father in a supreme sense to which other men did not attain. I for one cannot doubt that the Blessed Virgin told Him, as soon as He was old enough to understand them, the wonderful things connected with His birth which she had "kept

<sup>8</sup> Rom. ii. 15.

... and pondered in her heart." <sup>9</sup> And in a thousand ways the difference between Himself and others must have forced itself upon Him. But at anyrate, while He was a boy, His mental outlook may have been chiefly composed of these two elements, intense moral sensitiveness, and unbroken sense of, and joy in, God's presence. And the only glimpse we get of Him between earliest infancy and full-grown manhood confirms this view. A correspondent, writing to me sometime ago about religious difficulties, referred to Christ's "desertion of His Mother in the Temple, and His apparent indifference to her natural anxiety." But surely that misreads the whole incident. Nothing would be easier than for Christ and His Mother to be parted in the dense crowds which assembled for the Passover. What then would a thoroughly nice, thoroughly intelligent boy do? He would argue, "If I run from place to place Mother may never find me. If I stand still at one place she is sure to find me sooner or later." And where would the village boy, stunned and confused by the crowd and noise, feel most safe? And where would such a boy as Jesus most desire to be? The only thing to cause wonder is that St. Joseph and the Virgin did not go at once to the Temple. There is something entirely natural in Christ's surprised question, "But why did you look for me anywhere except in My Father's house?" <sup>10</sup>

If we regard our Lord's Baptism as the occasion of His coming to a full recognition of His nature and office—and it is always when we are endeavouring to "fulfil all righteousness" that we are most likely to gain spiritual enlightenment—the Temptation is seen to be more than natural; it is inevitable. At the beginning of his story, *The Naulahka*, Mr Kipling describes how Kate Sheriff, the heroine, has trained as a doctor, with no special sense of vocation. Then, almost unwillingly, she attends a missionary meeting, and hears of the condition of Indian women. With a certainty which cannot be denied she recognizes that here is the Call, here is her vocation. When the

<sup>9</sup> Luke ii. 19.

<sup>10</sup> I am convinced that "at My Father's house" and not "about My Father's business" is the right translation of Luke ii. 49.

students stream out of the lecture-hall she breaks away from her laughing, chattering companions and goes into a quiet lonely garden. Immediately the Spirit driveth her unto the wilderness.<sup>11</sup> The need for quiet, the need to think out the meaning of this new idea, and its implications for her future life, is instant and insistent. Comparing great things with small how could it be otherwise with Christ. He had to see what was implied in those words, "Thou art My Beloved Son."

And if the retreat into the Wilderness is wholly natural, the Temptation itself is not less so. I have never regarded the gospel story of the Temptation as giving us more than a selection of all that Jesus experienced during the forty days. But are not the temptations just such as come to us? The author, the artist, the politician, suddenly springing into fame, and realizing that the world is at his feet, has first to meet the temptation to use the new powers at his disposal in the service of the flesh, for gratification of "the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life."<sup>12</sup> Here, again, we may quote Mr Kipling, He represents Dick, the hero in *The Light that Failed*, as assailed, and almost conquered, by just this temptation when he comes back to England to find himself famous. But such temptations of the flesh are, after all, on the lowest grade. Nobler minds are differently approached by Satan. The man whose aims lie outside himself, the patriot, the servant of a great cause, the reformer, the teacher of some new truth, is tempted, sooner or later, to strive for an admitted good by unworthy means, to let the means justify the end. The kingdoms of this world were to become "the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ."<sup>13</sup> If this end could be hastened, and gained without Calvary, by just a little accommodation to Satan, why not? And yet, even from the lowest point of view, we know that Christ was right. No statesman, no leader of men, has ever attained real greatness who has not, at least once, chosen loss of office, of power, apparently of all prospects of future success, rather than palter with principle. And lastly, for the worker in spiritual things—and in a measure, too, for the

<sup>11</sup> Mark i. 12.

<sup>12</sup> 1 John ii. 16.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. xi. 15.



artist, the poet, the man of science—there lurks a yet more subtle temptation, to be a secret charlatan, to attract attention, admiration and wonder to himself and not his message. If Christ had come down unscathed from the pinnacle of the Temple how He would have concentrated the notice and the astonishment of all men on Himself! Self is an enemy hard to dislodge from its fortifications. How Milton knew poor fallen human nature when he called fame

That last infirmity of noble minds:

But I do not want to pursue the subject further. What will help the reader is not this man's reading of Christ's acts, nor that man's reading, but his own interpretation. All I have been trying to show is how our Blessed Lord's true humanity must be the key by which we seek to interpret Him. We shall understand Him best when we let life, and literature, and the soul's experience of ourselves and our friends, illustrate and explain His actions and words. If we trace in the gospels His growing sense of the clash and conflict between His conception of the Kingdom of Heaven and the world as it is, if we see Him "stedfastly setting His face to go up to Jerusalem,"<sup>14</sup> if we note how, in the Garden of Gethsemane, He wins the battle, as it were, at long range, so that when the arrest, and trial, and mocking, and crucifixion actually come, He is the one calm and dignified figure in all the turbulent crowds, we shall not merely understand a thousand things in the story, but we shall know how truly the Son of God is also Son of Man. And it is when we most realize His oneness with us, so that "He was in all points tempted like as we are," that we shall most realize how immeasurably He is above us, and shall be moved to say, "Never man spake like this Man."<sup>15</sup>

But it is not enough to strive for a new and clearer vision of the Saviour, as described in the last chapter, nor to try to understand and interpret His words and actions as recorded for us in the gospels. We must try to reinterpret Him in terms of our own day and country. In that

<sup>14</sup> Luke ix. 51.

<sup>15</sup> John vii. 46.

exquisite book, *The Christ of the Indian Road*,<sup>16</sup> the author tells the following story :—

“ A friend of mine was talking to a Brahman gentleman, when the Brahman turned to him and said, ‘ I don’t like the Christ of your creeds and the Christ of your churches.’ My friend quietly replied, ‘ Then how would you like the Christ of the Indian Road ? ’ The Brahman thought a moment, mentally picturing the Christ of the Indian Road—he saw Him dressed in Sadhus’ garments, seated by the wayside with the crowds about Him, healing blind men who felt their way to Him, putting His hands upon the heads of poor, unclean lepers who fell at His feet, announcing the good tidings of the Kingdom to stricken folks, staggering up a lone hill with a broken heart, and dying upon a wayside cross for men, but rising triumphantly and walking on that road again. He suddenly turned to the friend and earnestly said, “ I could love and follow the Christ of the Indian Road.” ”

Surely this should teach us a lesson. If we want Jesus to take His proper place in our lives we must try to see him as He would be in London or Manchester or Birmingham to-day ; as he would be in a Durham pit village among the miners, or in a Cornish fishing village with the fishermen, as he would be with undergraduates at our universities or with the piecers and spinners in our mills, the moulders and turners and riveters in ironworks. And if we want Him to take the place that belongs to Him in other people’s lives as well as in our own, we must try to help them too to see Him in this way. Recently I have been talking to the mothers of my parish, at their Lenten Mission services, not of the Christ of the Indian Road, but of the Christ of the Oldfield Road, Salford ; Christ as He would be visiting tired, over-driven mothers in our tenement buildings, or the stone-floored cottages of our back streets ; talking to rough lads of eighteen and twenty out of work, many of them ever since they were sixteen, and now loafing at street corners, wretched and sore and embittered, losing hope and self-respect, dimly conscious alike of their own degradation and of the fact—for it is a fact—that society

<sup>16</sup> *The Christ of the Indian Road*, by E. Stanley Jones. Hodder & Stoughton, 1926.

has never given them a chance; Christ sitting by the Tank in the open space, gathering to his knee the children who play round it, talking to them, and taking them in His arms and blessing them; Christ, a welcome guest at the wedding breakfast, or at tea when we get back from the cemetery. And I could see how the idea moved them, and how profoundly true it is now, as it was nineteen centuries ago, that "The common people hear Him gladly."<sup>17</sup> Again, when speaking to the students of a technical college in the dinner hour, and speaking at their request on the subject, "What does Christ stand for to me, a technical student?" I asked them to try and realize what Christ would be if He were with them in the laboratories, the lecture-rooms, the college common-room. And I asked them to remember that He would not have been with them, and interested in them, only in the hours of study. In their sports, and hours of recreation, He would have been with them, even in their Shrove Tuesday collection for the hospitals. I got a furiously indignant letter of protest from someone who had not been present, but had read a report in the paper. But can we believe that, if Jesus were on earth to-day, He would ignore the most interesting and hopeful class of the community, the educated young men and women of our day? They are so full of generous emotions, so quick to respond to all that is good, so eager for a firm faith, and often so pathetically conscious of their lack of it. And no one can know them, or win their sympathy, who knows them only in their hours of work or of worship. This "Man, gluttonous and a wine-bibber, this Friend of publicans and sinners,"<sup>18</sup> would, I think, again stir the contempt of hard, respectable, narrow-minded men and women by going with the young people at all times of their play as well as of their study, of their mirth as well as of their sorrow.

And there is one thing more that needs saying, for it is easily forgotten. He Who beheld the young man who had great possessions and loved Him,<sup>19</sup> would not be absent from the houses of the rich. There are few more beautiful and gracious things than life in a wealthy home where Christ

<sup>17</sup> Mark xii. 37.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. xi. 19.

<sup>19</sup> Mark x. 21 and 22.

reigns ; and during my time in Lancashire I have known many "rich men furnished with ability, living peaceably in their habitations . . . who were the glory of their times,"<sup>20</sup> and I have thanked God for their personal witness to Christ and their great public services to their city and country. But surely there is no more wretched and unhappy class than the idle rich, the "smart set," whose lives are spent in a mad whirl of distractions, and who are always chasing pleasure, and never attaining happiness. What would Jesus say to them if, amid the ceaseless racket of their lives, He could make His voice heard? No one but He, I am sure, can heal the deep disease of such souls.

<sup>20</sup> Ecclus. xliv. 6.

## CHAPTER IV

### THE THREEFOLD PATH TO THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS

#### (iii) *Discipleship*

WE have considered the first two stages in the threefold path to a knowledge of our Saviour, namely, the effort after a clearer and more distinct vision of Him, and the effort after a deeper and more fruitful understanding of what St. Paul calls "the mind of Christ,"<sup>1</sup> His motives, that is to say, and way of looking at things. But there is a third stage, namely, the conscious effort to follow His example, and so to translate our knowledge of Him into practice. Of course, just as I said that the second stage is not to be regarded as something to be postponed till the first stage is completed—as though our mental picture of Jesus must be complete in every detail before we make our first efforts to understand Him—so I say of the effort to follow His example in daily life. There are three stages in our path to a full knowledge of Jesus Christ, and there is a sense in which they may be named as first, second and third. But they must act and re-act on one another. The more clearly we see Jesus the more He will hold our interest and wonder, so that we shall be forced to seek to understand Him and His message. And the more we understand Him the more He will claim, and receive, our loyalty and discipleship. And the more we try to follow Him in daily life the more our vision of Him will brighten, and our understanding of Him deepen. This last is specially true. Christ bears witness to this truth when He says, "If any man will do the will of Him that sent Me, he shall know the doctrine whether it be of God."<sup>2</sup> There is nothing that so helps faith and understanding as a determined effort to practice our religion. Even if we make but a poor job of it,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. ii. 16.

<sup>2</sup> John vii. 17.

even if we fail completely, we are better for the effort. This, of course, is in full agreement with modern psychology which teaches that "There is no impression without expression." "Doing" is the best method of "learning"; we need plenty of practical work, plenty of what our kindergarten teachers call "expression" work, in our religion. Indeed, sometimes, when people tell me that they cannot believe Christianity, I am sorely tempted to reply, "But what is there in your way of living which would make it in the least likely that you should believe it?" Once I yielded to the temptation, and the story is worth telling. In the days before the War a Manchester undergraduate, the son of a clergyman, with a religious bringing-up, used often to come down to my clergy-house on a Sunday evening, and after supper used to tell me of his religious doubts, and of the impossibility of his accepting orthodox Christianity any longer. One evening, being perhaps a little weary of the matter, I cut into his oration with the question, "What did you do this morning?" He looked very much surprised, and enquired why I asked him that. "Obviously," I replied, "because I want to know. What did you do up to two o'clock this afternoon?" After a moment's hesitation he grinned and said, "Well, as a matter of fact, I did not have breakfast till nearly eleven, and then I and the man who lodges in the same house played penny nap till our landlady came in from church and said she wouldn't have cards in her house on a Sunday." "Exactly," I answered, "and then you come down, after I've had a long, hard Sunday, and worry me with talk about your religious difficulties." I knew the lad well, and knew he was gentleman enough to take the rebuke in good part. As indeed he did. But I am sure it made him think. Now, I am very very far from believing that all religious doubts are the fruit of carelessness, levity or sin. On the other hand, I am quite sure, indeed, I have proved again and again, that carelessness, levity and sin are fruitful causes of unbelief. It is the pure in heart who see God,<sup>3</sup> and holiness, or at least a desire and effort after holiness, is the condition "without which no man shall see the Lord."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Matt. v. 8.

<sup>4</sup> Heb. xii. 14.



And certainly there is no better approach to the fuller knowledge of Christ than patient continuance in the effort to copy His example.

That being so we must boldly face the question, "Is it possible to follow the example of Jesus here in England, and in the twentieth century?" Many people, of course, declare that it is not. Many people say, quite confidently, "You can't be a Christian in business." "If any man tried to put the example of Jesus into practice literally to-day he'd be bankrupt, or shut up in a mad-house, in six months." On the other hand, men and women of middle age will remember the enormous sale of the American novel, *In His Steps; or, What would Jesus Do?* some thirty years ago. The book may have been, perhaps was, silly, sentimental, exaggerated. Its enormous popularity did at any rate witness to the wide-spread and deep-seated conviction in the minds of millions of simple Christians that we ought to be able to follow His example. Is it possible to do so? What shall we say?

Well, of course, it is often easy to prove that when a man says, "You can't be a Christian in business," what he really means is that you can't be one without running serious risks of financial loss. And experience also proves that on those occasions when a man is willing to put principle before profit he often gains far far more, even in worldly matters, than he loses. I could quote many stories from real life, stories for which I could vouch, to prove the truth of Christ's words, "Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you."<sup>5</sup> Yet I am sure it is wise, as well as honest, to admit that it is not always possible to follow Christ as closely as we should wish. I do not mean that it is not always easy, or pleasant, or safe, or profitable. I mean quite literally that it is not always possible. During the War I shocked many excellent people by saying, in the columns of the *Manchester Guardian* and elsewhere, that it was not always possible to act rightly, for the perfectly obvious and plain reason that there are circumstances in which no right course of action remains, but merely the choice between a bad one and a worse. I got

<sup>5</sup> Matt. vi. 33.

many letters of protest, saying that such a statement was wicked and shocking, and that no minister of the gospel ought to have made it. But surely the opposite statement, namely, the statement that it is always possible to act virtuously, is the wicked one. Shall I teach my young men here in Salford that if they are lazy, self-indulgent, dishonest, untruthful, cruel and vicious for ten years they will, on the first day of the eleventh year, be in just as good a position to act virtuously as they would have been if, for ten years, they had lived strictly? Surely not. They may find themselves "tied and bound with the chain of their sins." Sir Anthony Hope, than whom no novelist writes with a truer ethical insight, says in his novel *Mrs. Maxon Protests*, "A mean thing it undoubtedly was, even if it were the right also in the eyes of many people; for to such unfortunate plights can we sometimes be reduced by our own actions that there really is not a thing both right and straight left to do." Nor is it only our own evil actions in the past by which we are tied and bound. Our environment, for which our responsibility may be relatively small, hampers us at every turn. Who can hope to act with ideal rightness and justice in such a world as ours? When I talk or write in this way, people often tell me that it may be right, but that it is a pity to say so, since it discourages young people, and weakens their efforts to do right. I am sure that the exact opposite is true. What I have just said should not merely be admitted: it should be insisted on. For very many young people—far more, I am certain, than elderly people realize—embark on the work of life with a real desire to live nobly. But very soon they are confronted with some situation in which it seems impossible to do right. Every possible course of action open to them falls short of what their conscience demands. Then perhaps they consult some middle-aged friend, and are told, "You must just do the best you can. Of course, what you propose is not strictly right. But what can you expect in a world like this?" But then Christianity, which they looked on at first as a glorious adventure, assumes the appearance of a mean system of compromises and concessions. And so they hastily conclude that, "You can't be a Christian in



business," and simply give up trying. Had they been taught to recognize that the fault lies not in Christianity but in ourselves, and in an evil state of society, they would have been content when they could not be perfect to be as nearly perfect as they could. And in so doing they would have done much to reform both themselves and the world. And that is what we want. For the besetting sin of young people is day-dreaming. They picture themselves acting nobly under circumstances which are never likely to occur. They paint ideal pictures of an impossible world when socialism, or some other cure-all, shall have altered "the system" which they hold responsible for all evils. But what we want, what the world wants, is not dreams of what we would do if we and the world were different, but the spirit that bids a man "deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Jesus."<sup>6</sup> If we can't follow His example as closely as we would, let us follow it as closely as we can, and try to let our very failures show us what in ourselves or in society needs to be altered so as to be made subject to Christ.

What I have said about environment suggests another caution. We must try to get at the spirit of our Lord's words so as to see what their application would be under modern conditions. I heard a secularist in the street once quoting Christ's words, "Give to him that asketh thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not thou away."<sup>7</sup> He asked how much he would have left, to take home to his wife and family on Saturday, if for one week he tried to obey that command. I replied that social conditions were quite different in Christ's day. Money played a much smaller part in daily affairs. A man who practised open-handed hospitality to the traveller, or to his poor neighbours, might often have to go short himself, or at any rate to miss some luxuries and comforts, but he would not be permanently impoverished. It would be a question of cheerfully welcoming a fifth to a meal prepared for four, or of killing, for the chance guest, the fatted calf meant for the family gathering a week hence, rather than a question of losing all one's possessions. Then I told the crowd the story of two

<sup>6</sup> Matt. xvi. 24.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. v. 42.

men I had known, and asked them which most closely followed the teaching of Jesus. One, a hard-headed and wealthy business man, used openly to boast at the club that if a woman or child begged of him as he went home in the evening he always gave something. "To refuse a woman on a wet, cold night spoils the taste of my dinner, so I give her a shilling just as I would spend a shilling on a cab to avoid getting wet." If this was an accurate statement of his motives, he ran the risk of degrading a fellow-creature rather than have a passing feeling of discomfort. Compare this with the behaviour of a working-man I knew well for many years. He often said that he had not much money to give. But he was untiring in his efforts to help any man who was ill or out of a job. When some soldiers were stationed near where he lived he denied himself in many ways, so that there might always be a fire in his front room, that young soldiers wanting a place of quiet away from the others might come in at any hour. In a word, he had little to give, but he gave himself freely. When I asked the crowd which of these two men most truly obeyed Christ's command, the secularist accused me of trying to wriggle out of the plain meaning of our Lord's words. But, of course, he was himself doing what Jesus most strongly condemned, namely, insisting on the words of a law and missing the spirit.

Another point needs insisting upon, though I have treated it before in another book.<sup>8</sup> I refer to the obvious necessity for beginning at the beginning, and learning to walk before we try to run. When anyone quotes Christ's words about the non-resistance of evil, someone is sure to ask whether it means that we ought to scrap our navy, disband the army, and discharge all the police. But no nation can be more Christian than the average of its citizens. The first step is for each of us, as an individual, to try to follow the example of Jesus. I had a proof, commonplace and trivial, yet to me profoundly suggestive, only the other day, of the practical workableness of Christ's teaching. I had been preaching on the topic, and then, a few days after, a middle-aged working-woman said to me,

<sup>8</sup> *Personal Religion and Public Righteousness*, Longmans. p. 80.

"I was getting on the tram yesterday, and I had a lot of bundles. The conductor was proper nazzie with me, and I was just going to sauce him back again, when I remembered what you'd said. So I smiled at him and said, 'Aye, I'm a proper nuisance, loaded up with bundles the way I am, and at the busy time of the day, and all. But I'm being as quick as I can.' When I got off he called me 'Ma'm,' and helped me with my parcels, and said, 'We've a lot to put up with from some folks. One speaks hasty at times.' You see he was offering me a kind of apology. He'd never have done that if I'd been cross back at him. It's wonderful the way the gospel works if you give it a chance."

In trying, then, to follow the example of Christ, let us remember these three vitally important truths:—

- (i) There may be circumstances under which it is not possible to follow Him perfectly, owing either to our own sinful past or a bad environment. In such circumstances there is only the more obligation to do the very best we can.
- (ii) The imitation of Christ is not a matter of formal copying in externals; nor a matter of rigid obedience to the letter of His teaching. We want to have "the mind of Christ." What we need to obey is not the letter, but the spirit of His commands, "for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life."<sup>9</sup>
- (iii) We must walk before we can run; we must exercise ourselves in little matters before we tackle great ones. And every fresh level of truth must be reached and conquered by individuals before it can be occupied and possessed by whole nations.

If we remember these things, and if we are inspired by the desire to be pioneers, always pressing onwards and trying to extend the kingship of Jesus, and to bring fresh and fresh regions of human thought and practice "into captivity . . . to the obedience of Christ,"<sup>10</sup> there is one thing we shall very quickly realize, namely the utter absurdity of the notion that Christ's moral teaching consists of extravagant, even if beautiful, oriental metaphor and paradox,

<sup>9</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 6.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. x. 5.

which must not be taken too seriously, and which is incapable of being applied literally. There is no teaching so plain, so sane, so homely. Truly, "He knew all men, and needed not that any should testify of man: for He knew what was in man."<sup>11</sup> Or, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, "He required no evidence from anyone about human nature; well did He know what was in human nature."

I do not want to go in detail into the question of applying Christ's teaching to daily life in the twentieth century, because, as I have already said, anything the reader thinks out for himself will be far more valuable to him than anything I can say. But I may permit myself one illustration, both because it shows my meaning and because I myself have been much helped by it. Consider the treatment of children and young people. For centuries we pinned our faith to "discipline." Children must be made to obey, to do as they were told. Or else we relied on a system of rewards and prizes. Many people, of course, were enlightened enough to distrust such methods. I remember how my mother used not only to laugh, but to teach me and my brothers to laugh, when we were little, at an absurd tract with coloured pictures called *Dame Partlett*, a few lines of which still linger in my mind:—

To those who well their collect said,  
She gave a cake of diet bread;  
For those who always said their prayers,  
She kept her apples and her pears;  
While those who went to church on Sunday,  
Were sure to get some buns on Monday.

But though such bare-faced bribery was out-of-date even in mid-Victorian times, it cannot be denied that we did rely, for centuries, on a system of rewards and punishments. Then someone "remembered the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive,'"<sup>12</sup> and instead of threatening punishments and promising rewards we tried the experiment of asking for service. And the really amazing response of our boys and

<sup>11</sup> John ii. 25.

<sup>12</sup> Acts xx. 35.

girls to the "Scout" and "Guide" ideals proves how truly Jesus did understand human nature. For, of course, Dr. Moffatt is right when he translates the sentence, "To give is happier than to get." And experience proves that true happiness is only possible for the man who is content to be in the world "as he that serveth."<sup>1</sup>

But this is but one example of the complete reasonableness and workableness of Christ's maxims. Let it be our task to find other examples, and to test them by practice.

<sup>13</sup> Luke xxii. 27.

## CHAPTER V

### CHRIST'S REVELATION OF HIMSELF

WE have been considering the threefold manner in which we may prepare ourselves for a personal knowledge of our Saviour. We know that now, as when He was on earth, He manifests Himself to His disciples "and not unto the world."<sup>1</sup> But we know also that He desires to manifest Himself to every soul for whom He died. Clearly then we must try to make it possible for Him to do so to us. And the threefold path of a clearer vision, a deeper understanding, and a more earnest effort at discipleship, is the right way to prepare. But we must clearly understand that all that we do, or can do, is no more than to prepare for a revelation. The revelation itself is wholly His work, done in His own way and at His own time. We must not try, we ought not to wish, to hasten the revelation, still less to force it. We may be depressed, and wonder why the personal knowledge of our Saviour seems to be denied to us. And the time may seem long. But when we know Him we shall realize that the time was exactly right. We may say, in the wonderful words of Habakkuk<sup>2</sup> (I use Dr. Moffatt's translation, though the Authorized Version is clear enough):—

On my watch-tower I will stand  
At my post on the turret,  
Watching to see what He will say to me,  
What answer He will offer to my plea.  
Then answered the Eternal,  
"Take down this oracle on your tablets,  
Plainly, that one may read it at a glance,  
The vision has its own appointed hour,  
It is ripening, it will flower :  
If it be long, then wait,  
For it is sure, and it will not be late."

<sup>1</sup> John xiv. 22.

<sup>2</sup> Habbakuk ii. 1-3.



Yes, it may seem to delay, but it is sure, and when it comes it will be recognized as coming just right, neither too soon nor too late. For, indeed, the vision cannot come before the soul is ready, nor be delayed a moment after that time.

But while we must not seek to anticipate Christ's revelation of Himself, we may very profitably consider the ways in which He comes to men. Of course, there is a sense in which it is true that the experience of no two souls is quite the same. Yet here, as in the physical world, though no two individuals are wholly alike, yet classes, orders, families and genera do exist. We can recognize various types of religious experience.

Now, I do not think it can be disputed that for many men one great avenue of approach to Christ, and of His coming to us, is the Blessed Sacrament. When J. H. Shorthouse puts into the mouth of John Inglesant, in his novel of that name,<sup>3</sup> the words "Communion after communion I find Christ, and He is gracious to me—gracious as the love of God Himself," he describes an experience which millions have shared. When I was at Cambridge an undergraduate, now a Missionary Bishop, said to me, "I don't believe in the *Real Presence*, because I believe in the divinity of Christ. It's the other way round. I believe in the divinity of Christ because I find Him present at the Altar to meet me." Here is an extract from a letter from a soldier, a working-lad with nothing more than an elementary school education, in Gallipoli: "To-day we had a celebration of Holy Communion, in the open air, just behind the lines. The Altar was a pile of empty biscuit tins, and the roar of the guns was so loud you often could hardly hear. But I have never known Christ so near." Or, if anyone thinks that the lad was repeating, sincerely perhaps, but none the less at mere second-hand, what others had taught him, here is another piece of witness. Before the War I prepared for baptism and confirmation a young journalist of about twenty-five years old, a university man of quite exceptional ability. He eagerly accepted all I

<sup>3</sup> *John Inglesant*: a Romance by J. H. Shorthouse. Macmillan. Chapter XXVI.

taught him till I spoke of the *Real Presence*. Then he asked whether he need hear anything about that, and whether it would not do if he thought of the Holy Communion merely as a memorial of Christ's death. I told him he must let me say what I believed, but that he must accept only what commended itself to his mind and conscience. He let me state my beliefs; but I could see he did not care for them. He was confirmed in November, and communicated weekly at eight o'clock in my church, walking from the extreme other end of Manchester. After the service on the Easter Day following his Confirmation he asked to speak to me for a minute. I took him into the vestry and he said, "I know now what you mean by the Real Presence. Christ came to me this morning as never before. The whole church was filled with His presence." And his whole subsequent life, till he was killed as an officer in the R.A.F. towards the end of the War, confirmed the reality of his experience.

It would, of course, be easy to quote endless examples of help and strength gained through the Blessed Sacrament. I think of the Walworth working-man, struggling to keep away from his besetting sin of drunkenness, and explaining his presence at Holy Communion on a week-day with the words, "A wet Bank Holiday, sir! It wasn't safe to stay away." Or the young carpenter, working on the Panama Canal, combining with five mates to persuade a passing missionary to stop the night and give them a celebration in a little wooden hut, and then writing to me, "This is a dreadfully wicked place, and there is no religion as a rule. It did seem a comfort to get our Communion after being without it so long. I felt I had to write and tell you about it." Or hundreds of other incidents of the same kind. But the experiences I have in mind now involve something more than a sense of help and strength. They involve a definite sense of a Person present to bless. Even in this experience there are degrees. What does the reader make of the following, which I quote from Dean Ramsay's *Scottish Life and Character*, Chapter VI. :—

"A poor half-witted lad, who had evidently manifested a



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tendency towards religious and devotional feelings, asked permission from the clergyman to attend the Lord's Table, and partake of the Holy Communion with the other members of the congregation (whether Episcopalian or Presbyterian, I do not know). The clergyman demurred for some time under the impression of his mind being incapable of a right and due understanding of the sacred ordinance. But observing the extreme earnestness of the poor boy, at last gave consent, and he was allowed to come. He was much affected, and all the way home was heard to exclaim, 'Oh! I hae seen the pretty man.' This referred to his seeing the Lord Jesus, Whom he had approached in the Sacrament. He kept repeating the words, and went with them on his lips to rest for the night. Not appearing at the usual hour for breakfast, when they went to his bedside they found him dead. The excitement had been too much—mind and body had given way—and the half-idiot of earth awoke to the glories and the bliss of his Redeemer's presence."

I might have hesitated to quote this if I had not met with another story—for which, unfortunately, I have no evidence beyond the memory of a conversation of thirty years ago—which resembles it. A member of Mr Spurgeon's congregation in Newington told me, somewhere about 1896, that some time before Mr. Spurgeon had had in his church a little girl of eleven, suffering from spinal complaint, who greatly desired to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. For some time he hesitated, being doubtful about admitting one so young. But the child was very earnest in her desire, and would obviously not live long, so he admitted her. Afterwards she said, "He was there. He was there to meet me. I knew He would be."

I must not quote further examples. Few who have taken the trouble to study the evidence will deny that, for many people, the Blessed Sacrament is a very special way to this personal revelation of Christ's living presence.

Come to us, Lord, in our hours of depression,  
When on life's journey we walk, and are sad;  
Open the Scriptures, and teach us their lesson,  
Till our hearts kindle again and are glad.

And if Thou still find us feeble and frightened,  
Slow to believe what the prophets have said,  
Still at Thy Table our hearts shall be lightened  
When Thou art known in the Breaking of Bread.

But while we declare that the Blessed Sacrament is for many people the broad, open way to personal communion with Christ, we must recognize also that it is not the only way. Sometimes there is a sudden, and often almost overpowering, sense of His nearness and His love—when one is alone in prayer, or walking in a crowded street, sitting in a tram-car full of people, or lying awake in the middle of the night. Here again there are degrees. There may be words actually heard, or an actual vision, either of a form and a face or merely of radiance and brightness. Or there may be no more—and it is ample enough—than what a lady, a few days before this chapter was written, described as “an over-powering sense of His nearness, His actual presence, which was beyond anything I can describe.” Now these things *come*; they must not be sought. Yet though they come, and are not to be sought for, they do not come without cause or reason. And when we ask what it is that enables Christ to reveal Himself, we may confidently reply, “Anything that deeply and profoundly stirs our nature, breaking through the hard shell of convention and worldliness and reaching the depths of our spiritual being.” Great sorrow, especially if it is unselfish sorrow, sorrow for others and not merely for our own loss, will do it. The last time I saw the Rev. S. F. Collier,<sup>4</sup> the founder and creator of the Manchester Wesleyan Central Mission, very shortly before his death, was as we were walking away from a public meeting. He slipped his arm through mine, and as we walked he suddenly began talking to me of the death of his two gallant sons in the War. And he said, “The wonderful thing is that, amid all my grief, I have been more conscious of the living presence, and of the mercy and love, of my Saviour than ever before.” But here a caution is needed. Great sorrow, great mental anguish

<sup>4</sup> See his biography, *Collier of Manchester*, by George Jackson, Hodder & Stoughton, 1923.

will, if it is of the right sort and rightly borne, deepen spiritual insight and open a way for Christ into the soul. Great bodily weakness and suffering has no such effect. This needs emphasizing, for two reasons : firstly, because many devout people are deeply distressed, and even shaken in faith, on finding themselves spiritually cold and dead after a severe operation, or during acute pain ; and secondly, because many careless and worldly people imagine that they need not bother with religion while they are well, since, as soon as they are on a bed of sickness, they will automatically become very religious. But the devout invalids should be reminded of the close and intimate connection between body and soul which makes great exhaustion of vital energy in the body react on our spiritual powers, so that many people who have prayed, and prayed with power, when in health, may have to rest content during severe pain with the briefest ejaculatory prayer and dependence on the prayers of others. And careless and worldly people should be warned that, so far from it being true that illness and the approach of death bring religious sensitiveness with them, the exact opposite is true. The Prayer Book bids us pray that God would "suffer us not, at our last hour, for any pains of death, to fall from Thee."<sup>5</sup>

But while bodily weakness and pain have no such effect, great mental disturbance does undoubtedly open a way for spiritual forces. Two examples suggest themselves to my mind. No one can have read *God, the Invisible King*, without recognizing how the immense stress and strain of the War broke through the outer shell of Mr. H. G. Wells' mind and tapped, for a brief moment, a deeply hidden stream of mysticism. So, too, in the case of the late Mr. Clutton Brock. I have never been able to persuade myself that he was really of a mystical tendency. But under the influence of the War he certainly produced one book<sup>6</sup> of the purest and most refined mysticism. Perhaps in this connection I may quote an experience of my own. Though I have been interested in mysticism, and a reader of the mystics, for many years I do not think that my own approach to religion

<sup>5</sup> Burial Service.

<sup>6</sup> *What is the Kingdom of God ?* by A. Clutton Brock. Methuen, 1919.

is along the mystic way. But just after the War I had one strange experience. From 1914 to 1918 I was not able to get away for any holidays, but in 1919 I spent Monday to Saturday several times in a remote cottage in the Lune Valley, reading, writing and going for long solitary walks. One afternoon I had been walking along a seemingly endless country lane, little more than a grassy cart-track between hedges. It rose steadily for some time till it reached a point where a gap in the hedges gave a view over a wide stretch of open country. I had been curiously restless and expectant, and I sat down on a heap of stones overgrown with wild geranium, feeling that something, I did not know what, was going to happen. And here I will quote from an account written and published, in the form of a story, soon after :—

“ Suddenly, I knew.”

“ What did you know ? ”

“ Everything. All there is to be known. The nature of reality and the meaning of life, and the secret that all the philosophers have desired to know since thought began. I can't tell you, of course. I have heard ‘ unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter.’ But, one thing I will say. I knew in that moment that all life is one. Not only the life of men, and animals, and insects, and plants. No, the life that runs in the sides of the hills and beats like a great heart in the ribs of the mountains. And I knew what the writer of the *Book of the Revelation* meant when he said that the angel, which stood with one foot on the earth and one foot on the sea, ‘ lifted up his hand to Heaven and swore . . . that there should be time no longer.’ I knew that there was time no longer. Or, rather, I knew that there never had been time. Time is just a delusion, and real life, eternal life, is an everlasting now.”

No doubt psychologists could explain such an experience. But no one who has experienced it—and it is not in any way exceptional, as my readers probably recognize—will admit that any explanation can explain it away, or diminish its significance. “ But,” some people will ask, “ why do you, or rather how do you, connect this experience of a single, unique, all-embracing life with Christ, and

still more, with Jesus the Carpenter of Nazareth?" My reply—which, though entirely final and satisfactory for myself, will hardly satisfy all my readers—is: (i) that the Life I knew was the life of a Person; to talk of a "life force" would, in view of such an experience, be ludicrously absurd. And (ii) the Life I knew was good, was Love. And (iii) it was quite recognizably the same as the life one is brought into contact with in prayer, in Communion, and in those moment's of realization of a "Presence" of which I have spoken. I shall have to try to show what all this signifies intellectually, what it means for theology, in a later chapter.

Communion with Nature, then, is one path to God. At least for some souls. Martensen<sup>7</sup> tells us that "Tauler<sup>8</sup> passed once through the convent garden, and drew his cap over his eyes in order that the flowers might not disturb him in his abstract spiritual meditations. . . . Böhme<sup>9</sup> often says how pleasant it is to wander among the flowers on a fine summer's day, because it is then clearly perceptible how everything sprouts and grows, blooms and emits fragrance, in the living and all-replenishing power of God." It is men of the school of Böhme who will understand the words attributed to Christ in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, "Raise the stone and there thou shalt find Me; cleave the wood and there am I." We clergy are inclined to be impatient when people tell us that they feel nearer to God out in the fresh air, by running streams, and amid fields and woods, than they ever do in church. And, no doubt, much talk of this kind is a mere cloak for laziness, self-indulgence and neglect of duty. Yet we ought to recognize the existence of true "Nature mystics." Mere delight in natural beauty is not enough. Still less mere scientific curiosity, the attitude of the biologist or botanist. I once walked for a good many miles in the rain, across open country, with a very ragged tramp who was clearly a gentleman and a scholar. He declared that no sportsman, no collector, no

<sup>7</sup> *Jacob Böhme*, by Dr. H. L. Martensen. Hodder & Stoughton, 1885. p. 19.

<sup>8</sup> *German Mystic*, 1300-1361.

<sup>9</sup> *Mystic*, *Cobler of Gorlitz*, 1575-1624.



one who would or could kill anything, could know Nature. "When you know why St. Francis of Assisi called the wolf his brother, you'll know that God made all things very good. You must feel yourself part of the whole, first, though," was one of his sayings. I think I can dimly discern what he meant, and I am sure Wordsworth, and perhaps Charles Kingsley, would have understood entirely :

I left the crowded city streets,  
I trod again the open track,  
And birds and beasts and flowers once more  
Welcomed their erring brother back.  
I had not quite unlearned their speech,  
I answered yet the unspoken call,  
And to my weary heart and brain  
Their silences were musical.

I slept all night upon the ground.  
Oh ! but my rest was sweet to me.  
A child upon my mother's breast  
The long hours through I seemed to be.  
And when the sun, which bade me sleep,  
Arose refreshed and bade me rise,  
He woke me with a warm caress,  
As if my mother kissed my eyes.

The kind wild creatures of the woods  
Came and gazed at me as I lay ;  
" Oh, brother, these long weary years,  
Where have you been ? " they seemed to say.  
There was no haste, nor any fear ;  
I saw no terror in their eyes ;  
Methought they bade me welcome home,  
And met me with a glad surprise.

The jackdaws on the craggy ledge,  
The dippers in the mountain stream,  
The troutlets in the silent pool  
'Mid glancing shadows dimly seen,  
These are my brothers ; I and they  
Are of one birth, are of one blood,  
And in my veins and theirs that day  
One common nature swelled at flood.

For where the earth is fresh and green,  
 And suns are warm and clouds are white,  
 Where winds are soft upon the cheek,  
 And stars bestrew the skies at night,  
 There I am native ; there's my home,  
 And though the City claim her thrall,  
 Yet still I know that Nature waits  
 To welcome back her prodigal.

But when we talk of Nature we must not fall into the common mistake of forgetting that Man is a part of Nature, and the highest, noblest, most significant part of Nature. *The Book of Proverbs* says of the Heavenly Wisdom that her "delights are with the sons of men,"<sup>10</sup> and there are men and women, true "nature mystics," who see in the crowded streets of great cities the Christ they never find in the most lovely country. A speaker at a Convention for Women and Girls, held in a very poor neighbourhood in Manchester, spoke of Service, from the text "His servants shall serve Him ; and they shall see His face."<sup>11</sup> She said that there was no surer way of coming to a vision of Jesus than by serving Him in His servants who need our help. Afterwards a married woman with forty years of faithful service, for women and girls, to her credit said to me, "That was the address that helped me most. I often don't seem able to realize the Divine Man far off in Heaven. But I find Him among the members of my Mothers' Meeting, and among the poor children." Here we touch, I believe, the strength and the inspiration of much of the work done by the Labour Party. I know, of course, that there is a strong secularist and anti-religious bias in one wing of the party. Just as there is also a very definitely religious wing. But between these two extremes there is a great section, especially among the rank and file, who are quite divorced from all organized religion, yet whose ideals and attitude of mind are not merely religious but essentially Christian. Some could make their own the words quoted, in Chapter III., from *The Christ of the Indian Road*. They, too, might say that they did not like the Christ of our creeds and

<sup>10</sup> Proverbs viii. 31.

<sup>11</sup> Rev. xxii. 3 and 4.



churches, but that the Christ of the Mile End Road, the Christ of Kirkgate, Leeds, or Scotland Road, Liverpool, they could love and follow. Others have as yet not seen Him at all, though they have served Him in His suffering members. They, I think, will be among the number of those who, at the Last Day, will say, with astonishment, "Lord, when saw we Thee an hungered, and fed Thee, or thirsty, and gave Thee drink? When saw we Thee a stranger, and took Thee in, or naked and clothed Thee? Or when saw we Thee sick, or in prison, and came unto Thee?"<sup>12</sup> I am not a member of the Labour Party, nor blind to the fact that it, like all other parties and associations of men, has its faults. But perhaps if church people recognized more often the essentially Christ-like character of much of its inspiration and work, Church and Labour might draw nearer together.

Yet, here, as in the case of Nature, mere interest in human beings is not enough. No, nor even a real love for them. There must be, as my tramp friend said, some realization of the fact that God made all things very good, some "feeling ourselves part of the whole." I find it rather hard to put my meaning into words. We must, of course, hate sin; we must condemn what is evil. Yet one of the things which most attracts me in poor people, one of the things in which "the common people"<sup>13</sup> seem to me to come closer to Christ than people of the public school type, is just in this refusal to judge and to condemn. Writing some time ago in the *Manchester Guardian*, I said:—

"Whence comes the tenderness for the wrong-doer among the poor? I sometimes think it has its roots in a deep reverence for human nature, such as we find among the great artists and writers—in Rabelais, despite his clowning, in Cervantes, in Victor Hugo, in the great Russian writers almost always, in the greatest Englishmen more rarely. And I believe I know the reason. In South London we had little time to read our Bibles. And Nature, that great book of the revelation of God, was hid from our eyes. So we had to seek God in His other great volume, the book of human nature. And so studying it we learned to treat that book as the Book of the

<sup>12</sup> Matt, xxv, 37-39.

<sup>13</sup> Mark xii. 37.

Revelation should ever be treated, adding nothing to the words of this prophecy, and taking nothing from it, but accepting it as it stands with infinite reverence and love."

Perhaps we need to take the words, "Resist not evil,"<sup>14</sup> and "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged: condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned,"<sup>15</sup> much more literally than we have ever done yet. It is a maxim of the mystics that "only like can know like." Perhaps we need to catch something of His spirit, of Whom it was said, "He shall not strive, nor cry; neither shall any man hear His voice in the streets,"<sup>16</sup> before we can see Him as He is:—

Why should I strive, why should I cry,  
And press my case and claim my right,  
While deep in my own heart doth lie  
A kingdom of such rare delight,  
Where none dispute my sovereign might?

Still to protest! Still to demur!  
To judge, and blame, and criticize!  
Love is the true interpreter.  
Love only, with unbandaged eyes,  
Can see, for love can sympathize.

It is not true that love is blind,  
But fear and hate. Love has an art  
In every land his way to find;  
Nor alien speech avails to part  
Where love interprets heart to heart.

Why should I envy, grudge and fear?  
Meet wrong with wrong, and hate with hate?  
With this for my reward—to bear  
Among the rich and high and great  
A weary heart, disconsolate.

Give me a crust with labour won;  
A friend to share that crust at need;  
A bed prepared, when day is done,  
By honest toil. Ah! then indeed,  
In Heaven I sleep, with Christ I feed.

<sup>14</sup> Matt. v. 39.

<sup>15</sup> Luke vi. 37.

<sup>16</sup> Matt. xii. 19.

With gentleness to vanquish rage,  
To turn, in strife, the smitten cheek,  
So may I tread life's pilgrimage  
With the bless'd company who seek  
The hidden kingdom of the meek.

If then, while recognizing that Jesus manifests Himself when He wills, and that the manifestation is wholly His work, and not ours, we nevertheless ask what are the channels of such manifestation, and the conditions which render it possible, we may note the following :—

- (a) The prescribed ordinances of religion, prayer, meditation, silent waiting on God, and especially the sacrament of the Altar.
- (b) Any profound mental disturbance which tends to break through the hard shell of convention and daily habit, and to reach the spiritual depths of our being.
- (c) Anything that brings us into close contact with reality, whether that reality be Nature, in the usual acceptance of that word, or human nature. But it must be a real contact, and one that tends to identify us, as parts, with the whole reality.

The reader may wonder why I have said nothing about Truth (scientific knowledge) and Beauty (artistic appreciation) as pathways to the knowledge of Christ. Certainly Truth and Beauty ought to be pathways to God as truly as Goodness. But to discuss the circumstances under which they often are paths to the knowledge of God, and the reasons why they often are not, would draw us too far away from our main subject.

## CHAPTER VI

### NATURE AND EFFECT OF CHRIST'S REVELATION

WE have now to consider what is the nature of this personal knowledge of our Saviour. What are the effects on us when we come to know Him? I suspect that many people, in their inmost hearts, rather shrink from what they fear would be too trying an ordeal. They may even feel a sort of sympathy with the Gergesenes when they read of them beseeching Christ to depart out of their coasts.<sup>1</sup> I remember when I was at school we often had, in the School Chapel, the hymn, "At even ere the sun was set," and the lines :—

Thy kind but searching glance can scan  
The very wounds that shame would hide,

always gave me an unpleasant feeling. I did not want anyone to know all my misdeeds. What small boy does?

And, of course, there are better grounds for supposing that a realization of Christ's presence would be a more severe and exacting experience than the shrinking feelings of a small boy. Religious literature, within and without the covers of the Bible, teaches that when we see God we are convicted of sin. Coming into the white radiance of His face we see our own defilement. When Isaiah saw God "high and lifted up,"<sup>2</sup> he cried "Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." And I have told elsewhere how, at a Bible Study Circle, a young working-lad fastened on that passage and said, "When a man comes to know God, when he sees Him as it were, he knows how bad he has been. At least I'm sure that was how it was with all of us during the Mission."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Matt. viii. 34.

<sup>2</sup> Isaiah vi. 1.

<sup>3</sup> *Studies in the Devotional Life*, published by Wells, Gardner & Darton, pp. 67-68.

Well, all of this is true, profoundly true. Again and again I have seen, in men and women, in boys and girls, that a clearer realization of God always produces a deepened sense of sin. Indeed, it would be true to say that without a sense of sin there is no real religion, and without a growth in that sense of sin no growth in real religion.

Yet, when all this has been admitted, it is still true to say that the personal knowledge of Christ, and a sense of His living presence with us, so far from being a depressing or saddening experience is a most extraordinarily bracing and invigorating one. When Christ's living presence is felt a man realizes for the first time the full significance of the words, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."<sup>4</sup> And the reason for this bracing and invigorating effect of Christ's presence was well, if somewhat unconventionally, expressed by an Oxford undergraduate, who said, "When a fellow comes to know Christ personally, Christ makes him feel that he may have been a rotter, but that he is not a rotter really. What I mean is, one feels one has done plenty of rotten things, and one feels sorry for them and ashamed. But somehow one knows that that is not one's real character." That seems to me a very true and profound, even if crudely expressed, piece of psychological insight.

Perhaps I can make all that is implied in this a little clearer by a story of what seems to me one of the most Christlike actions I ever knew. When I first went to a public school, at the age of about thirteen, there was a boy of my own age whom I will call Brown Secundus. We could hardly be called friends; we did not go about together, were in different forms, and belonged to quite different sets. But we liked one another, and when we did happen to meet we talked freely. One day he was caught in a serious offence and was given the most serious punishment short of expulsion possible, namely, a public birching. The following Sunday afternoon, lying out on a rug in the school grounds, he said to me—and I can remember his very words almost—"You know D. (his house-master), of course. And you know he's not the man to put his arm

<sup>4</sup> John x. 10.

round your neck and call you pet names. He's never called me anything but Brown Secundus. Well, the night after I was birched he sent for me. When I went into his room he stretched out his arm and said, 'Come here, Charlie.' When I went and stood by him he put his arm round me, and said, 'Do you know, I was very sorry for you to-day. I'm sure you're not the sort of boy who would be likely to do that.' I was so surprized that I said, 'But I did do it.' 'Oh! yes,' he said, 'You did it. I know that. But we all do silly things sometimes, and wonder afterwards however we came to do them. I believe it was like that with you. I don't believe you would have done it if you had thought for a moment. And, anyhow, I shall go on believing in you, and feeling sure that you are really a nice, honourable fellow, whom I can respect and call my friend.' It's funny, isn't it? When I was birched I was angry and miserable. But when D. talked like that I was sorry and happy. And I'm going to show him he is right." And from that moment the boy made good. Of course, it is all perfectly plain and obvious when it is set down in writing. The master restored the boy's shattered sense of self-respect, and made him want to make good again, and made him believe that such a thing was possible. But how often do we behave like that? When people have done wrong we want to make them see how wrong they have been, and own it. Trying to make them sorry and ashamed we only succeed in making them feel angry and miserable. For we humiliate them, and so sap vital and spiritual energy. What we want to do is to make the man who has failed believe in the possibility of succeeding next time. And we make him believe in himself best by showing him that someone else believes in him.

I would like to quote another example. Years ago I knew a man who was drinking heavily. He took the pledge and kept it for some time. Then we heard of him as being in a certain public-house. Immediately my fellow-curate went in, and, to the publican's speechless indignation, brought the man out and took him to his home. There, for an hour or more, the man poured out one long stream of drunken abuse at the curate. At last, exhausted by his



own fury, he said, "It looks to me as if you'd never leave me alone." "No," replied my fellow-curate, "I never shall, not while we're both above ground." Years after the man's wife told me that that was the turning-point, "If I'm worth that to any man," her husband had said to her, "I'm worth something yet. I'll have another try."

Is it fanciful to say that we can so know Jesus to-day, so know Him as a living Person, or Friend, an overpowering, ever-present influence in our lives, that we can say that He behaves in this way too, restoring our belief in ourselves by convincing us of His belief in us? Surely not, For clearly that is not what we should, *a priori*, expect the effect of His presence to be. The lines I have quoted about "His kind but searching glance," and many other hymns of a penitential nature which could be quoted, express what we might *expect* the result to be. We should rather expect to be depressed, humiliated, and made to feel ashamed. And the official and orthodox teaching about "conviction of sin"—teaching true and valuable in itself, as I have said, and only to be condemned, if condemned at all, as one-sided—would tend to the same conclusion. Yet the experience of those who know Christ at first-hand is just the opposite. "When a fellow comes to know Christ personally, Christ makes him feel that he may have been a rotter, but that he is not a rotter really." And then, when we recognize that this is the effect of Christ's entry into our lives now, we go on to recognize that it was just how He worked when He was on earth. We see him restoring the self-respect of Zaccheus,<sup>5</sup> and of the woman of the city, who was a sinner, and from whose touch the Pharisee thought He should have withdrawn His feet<sup>6</sup>; stretching out His hand to touch the untouchable leper<sup>7</sup>; saying to the woman taken in adultery, "Neither do I condemn thee; go and sin no more."<sup>8</sup> And we see, too, in the witness of unnumbered souls, how true it is that the Good Shepherd goes after the lost sheep "until He find it."<sup>9</sup> When people with little first-hand

<sup>5</sup> Luke xix. 5.

<sup>6</sup> Luke vii. 37-39.

<sup>7</sup> Matt. viii. 2.

<sup>8</sup> John viii. 11.

<sup>9</sup> Luke xv. 4.

knowledge of religion read religious autobiographies, and descriptions of conversions and other spiritual happenings, they find the actors in such events describing their sensations and experiences in scriptural language, and they are tempted to think that those actors are merely repeating conventional phrases ; or, at best, that what they have read in the Bible has suggested, coloured, and perhaps caused, the experiences described. But the exact opposite is true. What the soul experiences recalls and explains things which till then had little or no meaning. It is not, if I may trust the experience I have had of many souls, early religious teaching, and memories of Bible readings and of theological lessons, which suggest the experiences I have been trying to describe ; it is the direct knowledge of the living Christ which first gives coherence and meaning to what we read in the Bible and what we were taught as children.

I am sure that this view needs emphasizing and insisting on. When we read religious biographies, and the lives of the saints, and mystical literature generally, it is easy to adopt the view that the experiences described have been wholly or largely induced by what the subjects of those experiences have heard of, or read. The chief actors are, that is to say, according to this view, unconscious imitators. Or, if we do not allow our rationalizing instincts to carry us quite so far as that, yet it is easy to adopt the view that the actual experiences have been coloured, shaped and extended by more or less unconscious imitation of traditional religious beliefs, and are expressed in conventional religious phraseology. This type of explanation is, I say, easy when we read religious literature ; when we are, that is, mere students of the written records. Though even when dealing with written records of conversions, of religious awakenings, of visions, and of mystical experiences generally, an alternative explanation, an explanation which accepts the entire spontaneity, reality and originality of the experience, often seems to cover all the facts better. When, however, it is a case, not of reading about religious experience, but of first-hand acquaintance with men and women, boys and girls, who come to the knowledge of Christ

Jesus, there is no room for doubt. It is then clear, clear as the day, that so far from creeds, doctrines and passages of Holy Scripture having caused the experiences, it is the experience of Jesus, the Way, the Truth and the Life, which gives meaning and reality to what was before a collection of dead and meaningless formulæ. The soul cries out, "Why, all this has been told me before a thousand times. And for all the good it did I might as well have been deaf. And now, in a moment, what were mere words have become living vital truths."

And of all truths of religion which is verifiable by direct experience there is none to be compared with the great basic truth, which Jesus came to reveal to the world, the truth that God is Love. The words are so familiar, so hackneyed, alas, that the world hears them and heeds not. And then there comes actual knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, and immediately water is not more directly known to be cool and thirst-quenching, nor the sun more directly known to be warm, than God is known and experienced as Love. I always tell my young people that no one thinks so well of them, no one has such a high opinion of them, as their Saviour. When they come to their Communion, if they could see Him they would see Him smiling on them; if they could hear Him speak they would hear Him saying, "Come in, come in! Friend, come up higher. Sit closer to Me. Take a more honourable place at the banquet." It is not merely that He still loves them in spite of their faults. That is true, of course. But it is but a small part of the truth. He sees them *now* as He means to make them, and in so doing He makes it possible for them to become what He would have them be. He believes in them, and so makes them believe in the possibility of becoming worthy of His love. Such teaching may seem dangerous. I am sure it is not. I am sure that, so far from making young people careless or conceited, it makes them penitent and anxious to please Him, eager not to disappoint Him.

So the sum of what we have to say is just this. Direct knowledge of our Saviour, so far from being a humiliating, depressing experience, is a most bracing, life-giving one.

When we know Him we know ourselves to be sinners. We are ashamed of having so fed on the husk that the swine eat, when the Bread of Life is to be had for the asking. We know our need of cleansing and healing. But sorrow and shame are swallowed up in something far more important, far more vital. The past only matters as something from which Christ has redeemed us. We say with St. Paul, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature, old things are passed away; behold all things are become new."<sup>10</sup> And again we say with him, "I can do all things, through Christ, which strengtheneth me."<sup>11</sup> We realize, with the direct, first-hand certainty of immediate experience, that to know the only true God, and to know Him in Jesus Christ, is, indeed, life eternal; eternal life which begins here and now, and extends far out beyond the confines of time and space.

<sup>10</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

<sup>11</sup> Phil. iv. 13

## CHAPTER VII

### THE INCARNATION AND THE VIRGIN BIRTH

WE now pass to the second part of our task. We have, so far, endeavoured :—

- (i) To see how we may prepare ourselves, by study of the record of Jesus given us in the Bible, by attempts to understand His teaching, and by efforts at putting that teaching into practice, for a personal revelation of the Living Saviour ; and
- (ii) to understand some of the ways in which that revelation of Jesus, as a Living, Ever-present Saviour and Friend, is made to various types of men ; and
- (iii) to see what is the nature of that revelation, and what are its effects on the soul to which it is granted.

We now face the question, “ If Jesus can, indeed, be thus known as a living Person, and if knowing Him has this life-giving, bracing effect, what conclusions must we draw ? ” What theology should grow from such an experience of Jesus ? Now it cannot be denied that many people, even many truly religious people, dislike theology. They contrast “ creeds and dogmas ” with “ simple religion,” very much to the disadvantage of the former. But this is merely one of the many bad legacies of the nineteenth century. Theology begins as soon as we try to think seriously and coherently about our religious experience, and as soon as we ask ourselves what that religious experience implies, and what it should teach us.

Nor need anyone feel that creeds are a restraint on freedom of thought. Many young people rebel at the idea of creeds because they feel, quite rightly, that they cannot believe things just because they are told to do so. And they want—and again, I would say, they quite rightly

want—to do their own thinking for themselves, and to be, in the best and noblest sense, “free thinkers”; thinkers, that is to say, constrained by nothing but the desire to follow truth wherever it leads. But there is nothing really incompatible in all this with belief in the teaching of the Church. The Church is like a very old and very wise woman who says to her children, “This is the experience of a long life. I offer it to you for your guidance. You will have to test it and prove it for yourselves. Indeed, it will be of little value to you till you have made it your own by your own efforts. But there is no reason why you should be left in religious matters, any more than in other spheres of life, without the help of the garnered wisdom of the past.”

And I should like to say that no philosophy, no other way of looking at life, supplies so firm a basis for clear thinking, nor takes account of all the facts of experience so fully as Christianity. I cannot pause to argue this point here and now. It would be a pleasant task to try to set out, as plainly as possible, a bird's-eye view of the Church's teaching in all its completeness and symmetry. But it would take me too long, and draw me too far from my main topic, namely, the Lord Jesus Christ. I did, indeed, when writing this book, actually begin the task. I wrote at this point in my manuscript the first two chapters of a popular account of Christian dogma. But I soon realized that much of what would need saying hardly fell within the proper limits of this book. Perhaps I may attempt the task some other time. I should like to. For I am sure it is the duty of every Christian to try to understand the doctrines of his religion. And I am sure, as I have said, that no other philosophy supplies so much help and guidance towards right living and clear thinking. Christ is the *Way*, and the *Truth*, as well as the *Life*. And I know, and have proved again and again, that many people who will tell you that they “can no longer believe the Christian faith,” really know nothing about it; and, while they fancy that they have been repelled by its contradictory and unscientific nature, have really been repelled by the absurd misrepresentations of Christianity



which one finds in the press and in popular fiction. But here and now I must confine myself to so much of Christian dogma as concerns the Person and Work of Jesus Christ.

First of all, then, we have to consider the fact and the method of the Incarnation. We have to ask, that is to say, firstly, whether God did, indeed, take human nature, and live on the earth as Jesus of Nazareth; and secondly, whether we can believe that His birth was not as other men's, but that He was "conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary." Now as to the first point, namely, the Deity of Jesus of Nazareth, I should like the reader to consider the following stories.

An exceptionally brilliant schoolboy, brought up in a very strict evangelical home, and who had just gained a scholarship at the university, suddenly announced that he could no longer accept the doctrine of the Deity of Jesus. He told me that he was quite convinced that Jesus was not God, but "just a good man like Socrates or the Buddha." I replied that, as a classical scholar, he would know the story of how Socrates was puzzled that the oracle should have called him the wisest of men, till he concluded that it was because he knew that he knew nothing, while other men were equally ignorant, but did not know it. "Now," I said, "if you came across a passage in the gospels in which Jesus was represented as saying, 'I know nothing of the Father, and I know that I know nothing. You know nothing of Him, but you deceive yourselves with the idea that you do. So, and only so, I am wiser than you,' would you accept it as genuine?" He at once replied, "No, I should unhesitatingly reject it as spurious. It would be out of harmony with all the rest of Christ's words." I then asked him why he would not accept as genuine a disclaimer on our Lord's part which would not seem unduly modest on the lips of Socrates. He burst out into a rhapsody, perfectly sincere I am sure, on the moral majesty of Jesus, and on his own desire to take Him as his model and his master. Then I pressed him to face the implication of his own words. "Why callest thou Him good?" I asked. "There is none good but

One, that is God.”<sup>1</sup> If he found in a Jewish peasant, a village carpenter of the first century, a moral majesty, a commanding holiness, a power of attraction and a beauty of character, quite distinct from the wisdom of Socrates or the genius of Shakespeare, what did that fact imply? How could he justify his attitude? Of course, if the reader has not felt the attraction of Jesus this argument will not appeal to him. But if he has fallen under that spell he is bound to face the question, “Why do I call Him good as I call no other man good?” and to go on to ask a further question, “What think I of Christ? Whose Son is He?”<sup>2</sup>

The second story concerns the young man whom I mention in the opening paragraph of Chapter III. Speaking recently at a meeting for young men and lads, he said, “It is no use denying that many people find it very hard to believe that Jesus is God. I used to have those difficulties myself. But the more I think about it the more clear two things seem to me. Firstly, if God were born as a man, that’s how He would be born, and how He would live and die. He’d not be born in a palace, but in a stable. He’d not live among the rulers, but as a working-man among poor people. He’d not be what the world counts a success. He would be crucified. And secondly, if God became a man, I can’t think He would be any different from what Jesus was. That is the sort of character He would show us. And that seems final to me.”

Take these two stories together, and see what they prove. If, without any preconceived ideas or beliefs, we start with Jesus of Nazareth as depicted for us in the gospels, we are led on to give Him such a status and dignity as forbids us to regard Him as less than God Incarnate. If, instead, we start with the idea of God and try to imagine how He would become man, and what manner of man He would be, we can formulate no other answer than that He would be born and live and die as Jesus did, and be in all things like Him. What other proof do we desire? What other proof is possible?

When we turn from the fact of the Incarnation to the mode, and ask what we are to believe about the Virgin

<sup>1</sup> Matt. xix. 17.

<sup>2</sup> Matt. xxii. 42.

Birth, the whole matter must be approached in a different way. One cause of the difficulty which many people have in this matter is that they regard only one aspect of Christ, namely, His life here on earth. Jesus, the Carpenter of Nazareth, is all they think about. But we have seen, in Chapter II., how necessary it is to give weight to all the evidence, and to find room, in our picture of Jesus Christ, not merely for Jesus as He walked the streets of Jerusalem and the fields of Galilee, but also for the Ascended and Glorified Christ, for the Great High Priest entered within the Veil, for the Logos, by Whom all things were made, and for the Goal of Creation, in Whom God will gather together all things that exist ; in short, for every aspect of Christ from Alpha to Omega. Let us be prepared to give weight to all the evidence.

Suppose I have on my palm a grain of wheat and a small piece of wood carefully carved and coloured so as to look exactly like a grain of wheat. If I plant both, one will produce a plant of wheat, shoot, stalk, ear, corn in the ear, the other will produce nothing. Why ? The reader replies readily, "The grain of wheat was alive." We don't know what life is. But we know that it is the active cause of all living growing things. And we seem to recognize various kinds of "life" or "spirit" corresponding to various kinds of living bodies. A seed of wheat does not give rise to an oak or a cabbage, nor the egg of a pigeon hatch out an alligator or an ostrich. Very slightly altering St. Paul's words,<sup>3</sup> we may say, "God giveth them bodies, as it hath pleased Him, and to every kind of life its own body." Now, consider a cherry tree. In the winter it seems composed of nothing but cold, hard, lifeless wood. But when spring comes the hard, seemingly lifeless twigs produce leaves, buds, blossoms. Later those tender white blossoms change into sweet, ripe, red cherries. Nothing but the fact that it happens so often and so regularly blinds us to the wonder of it. If we ask why the hard, dead-seeming wood produces red, sweet cherries, the only answer seems to be "The tree is alive." In other words,

<sup>3</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 38.

behind the tree, acting as its real cause, there is a cherry-life, a cherry-spirit, a cherry-soul.

Now consider the whole universe, or, for convenience sake, that part of the universe we know best, namely, this globe on which we live. It has passed, so science tells us, through a series of transformations not very unlike those of the cherry tree. For millions of years after it ceased to be a globe of white-hot matter it was a dead, inert mass. Then life, low forms of life which it would be impossible to describe as either animal or vegetable, appeared on it. Whence came life to this lifeless globe? Science has no answer. After more millions of years life produced conscious life, the life of animals capable of feeling pleasure and pain, desire and fear. Whence came consciousness? Science has no answer. Again millions of years passed away and man appeared, man capable of self-consciousness, of reason and morality, and æsthetic appreciation. Professor Lloyd Morgan<sup>4</sup> has coined a profoundly suggestive phrase. He speaks of "emergent evolution." New qualities "emerge." It is no mere re-arrangement of something known before. Life is more than dead matter; consciousness is more than life; self-consciousness is more than mere sentience. Yet each in turn appears as it were naturally, without external interference or obvious miracle. All seems to be in the natural order of things. How can we explain this? What is the cause of this growth, this evolution? Are we not compelled to regard the world as, in a sense, a living thing,<sup>5</sup> a single whole, an organism caused by a life, a spirit, a soul, of which it is the expression? But this world-spirit, this soul of the universe, is Christ, the Logos. Dr. Moffatt translates the opening verses of St. John's gospel:—

<sup>4</sup> Gifford Lectures, by Prof. Lloyd Morgan, "Emergent Evolution," 1922; "Life, Mind, Spirit," 1923. I need scarcely say that Professor Lloyd Morgan must not be held responsible for my presentation and expansion of his ideas.

<sup>5</sup> The idea of the universe as a living thing has been handled in a most illuminating way by the late Prof. G. T. Fechner, in his book *Zend-Avesta*, Leipzig, 1854. Unfortunately it has never been translated.

The Logos existed in the very beginning,  
 The Logos was with God,  
 The Logos was divine.  
 He was with God in the very beginning :  
 Through him all existence came into being,  
 No existence came into being apart from him.  
 In him life lay,  
 And this life was the Light for men :  
 Amid the darkness the Light shone,  
 But darkness did not master it.

It is most certainly "contrary to the Laws of Nature," as formulated from our present-day experience, that life should issue spontaneously from non-living matter. Science can give no explanation of the first appearance of life. Nor of sentience, nor of self-conscious reason. These things "emerge"; as inevitably as leaves, flowers, fruit emerge from the cherry tree. But if Christ, the God-Man, is indeed the Logos, the World-Soul, it may well be that His appearance, at a definite point in time, was as "natural," as inevitable, as the appearance of cherries on the cherry tree. He is the supreme achievement of the whole cosmic process, the goal of all the world's striving. The rich ripe cherry is the goal of the cherry tree's existence, that for which the tree exists. But the cherry life, the cherry spirit, was at work all along, in trunk and blossom and fruit. So the God-Man is the supreme end and goal of creation, but the Logos was at work in the universe from the first.<sup>6</sup> His, if this view is right, is the life in which Böhme saw everything sprout and grow, blossom and emit fragrance.<sup>7</sup> His is the life in which, in moments of mystical experience, we recognize the oneness of all life, and know it to be at once Personal and Loving. And to assert dogmatically that the the method of His birth must be the same as the method of generation of the common sons of men is absurd. If in His appearing the creative Spirit of God did a new thing, comparable to, yet even greater than, the new thing He did when life appeared on a lifeless world, or when life gave birth to consciousness, or consciousness gave birth to

<sup>6</sup> But see the Note on the Fall at the end of this chapter.

<sup>7</sup> See *ante*, p. 49.



the self-conscious ego, surely it is reasonable to expect that the method will itself be unique, exceptional and outside the ordinary courses of which natural science can take cognizance. To say, "This thing could not be," is in the very highest degree unscientific. What we ought to say is, "What is the historical evidence for it?" Let us face this question.

Now, clearly there are only two persons who could give first-hand evidence about the Virgin Birth, namely, the Blessed Virgin Mary and St. Joseph. And nobody can read the accounts of Christ's birth, as given in the gospels of St. Luke and St. Matthew, without seeing that they at any rate claim to be given from the point of view of those persons. As one reads St. Luke one is forced to say, "If this is true, and not mere imaginative fiction, it comes ultimately from Christ's Mother." Equally, the account in the gospel according to St. Matthew tells the story from the point of view of St. Joseph. What reasons are there for regarding these accounts as historical or unhistorical?

Let us take St. Luke first. He claims to have "traced the course of all things accurately from the first."<sup>8</sup> And it is certainly true to say that there are probably no books in the world which have been subjected to an examination so close, so rigorous, and so often repeated, as the Third Gospel and the Acts, and which have emerged from the ordeal so triumphantly. There is no need to claim infallibility for St. Luke. The growing convictions of the great majority of biblical critics during the last quarter of a century has been that St. Luke was a cautious and accurate historian, and that he was possessed of sources of information of exceptional value not open to the other evangelists. If the Acts was written, as Harnack claims, during St. Paul's imprisonment at Rome,<sup>9</sup> the gospel must have been written during the two years imprisonment at Cæsarea.<sup>10</sup> But in that case can we doubt either that St. Luke was a constant messenger between the imprisoned Apostle and the Christian community at Jerusalem, or that he used his visits to Jerusalem as opportunities to

<sup>8</sup> Luke i. 3, R.V.

<sup>9</sup> Acts xxviii. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Acts xxiii. 35, xxiv. 23 and 27.



collect evidence. This was not St. Luke's first visit to Jerusalem,<sup>11</sup> but that is a point we need not press. Between A.D. 56 and 58 he would be frequently in Jerusalem. Accepting 6 B.C. as the correct date for the birth of Christ,<sup>12</sup> and supposing the Virgin Mary to have been twenty when Jesus was born (though sixteen is a by no means improbable age, and B.C. 3 is a possible date for the Nativity), the Virgin Mary would be between eighty-four and eighty-six at that date. But my own mother, who lived to an advanced age, retained a vivid memory of her young days to the very end. Even after she had lost the power of being interested in current events, or of registering new impressions, she retained a vivid memory of her childhood's days in Kensington; of seeing, from the windows of my grandfather's house in Hampshire, six rick-yards flaming at one time during the rick burnings of the "hungry forties"; of how she first met Thackeray; and of a thousand other things of which she loved to tell and I to hear. And I noticed, as I suppose we have all noticed with old people, that she would always tell a story in the same words, hardly varying a syllable in her account of things connected with the golden days of childhood and youth, of courtship and of marriage, things which she had kept and pondered in her heart.<sup>13</sup> There is nothing in the least improbable in the idea that St. Luke met the Virgin Mother at the house of St. John.<sup>14</sup> It is impossible to read St. Luke's writings without realizing that "the beloved physician" must have been a man of rare charm and sweetness. I know no more attractive mental picture than that of the eager, gentle, courteous young man sitting at the feet of her whom all generations have called Blessed, and hearing from her own lips the greatest story in the world. I would ask the reader to turn once more to the opening chapters of the Third Gospel. Are they poetic myths, beautiful, but merely imaginative, legend? Or are they one of God's best gifts to the human race?

When we turn to the First Gospel it is difficult to resist

<sup>11</sup> Acts xxi. 17.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Article on Chronology of the N.T., Peek's Commentary.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Luke ii. 19 and 51.

<sup>14</sup> John xix. 27.

the impression that we have St. Joseph's narrative. But St. Matthew was the son of Alphæus or Cleophas (the two names are different renderings of the same Aramaic name Chalphai), and Eusebius says that Hegesippus (A.D. c. 160) "relates that Cleophas was the brother of Joseph." Whether St. Matthew had the story direct from the lips of St. Joseph himself, or whether it came to him through his Mother (and, as we shall see, there are many reasons for believing that, at any rate in his account of the Resurrection, St. Matthew owes some of his distinctive matter to his Mother, "Mary, the wife of Cleophas"), the evidence is surely amazingly good. For what other event, in ancient history, have we anything like as good evidence?

I do not pretend to be an unbiassed judge. The idea of the "Second Adam," God's new start for a fallen race, occupies so central a place in my theology that I have often said that I should have to hold the doctrine of a Virgin Birth as a private and pious opinion of my own, even if there were no sure warrant for it in Holy Scripture. And belief in Christ, as the Logos, and the teachings of science about "emergent" evolution, makes the doctrine highly probable. The historical evidence appears to me to be not merely as good as one could expect, but more than one would have dared to hope for.

NOTE.—*The Doctrine of the Fall*.—I have spoken of Christ, the Logos, as the underlying spiritual cause of the universe "by Whom all things were made," and the moving and sustaining force "upholding all things by the word of His power."<sup>15</sup> This, I am sure, is true. When, however, we face the facts of pain and death; of "nature red in tooth and claw"; of such things as disease microbes, cancers, parasitic creatures like the ichneumon fly, and poisonous snakes, in animate nature; and of volcanoes, earthquakes, etc., in inanimate nature, we are confronted with a real difficulty. There is a way out. But the persistent refusal of our leading theologians to face the question of the Fall is playing havoc with theology. No coherent thinking in theology is possible till a man has made up his mind whether he does or does not believe in a Fall. Modern

<sup>15</sup> Heb. i. 3.

theologians may reject the Fall, and regard evil as no more than a transient incident in the evolution of the universe; and if they do so, they may be able to work out a theology at once consistent and edifying. But it will not be the faith held and taught by the Catholic Church for nineteen centuries, for the Church has always offered Christianity as a religion of Redemption. Or, again, theologians may accept belief in a Fall. But in that case it will not be the fall of any single human being, here on this earth, at some point in man's evolution from a lower stage of development, but a corruption of the entire cosmic process from the very beginning. But the subject of the Fall is too vast for treatment here and now. I will merely assert my belief that the entire evolutionary process is the outward manifestation of the conflict between the fallen humanity of "the first Adam" and the new humanity of the "the Second Adam," and that the consummation of all things will be attained when we are all "in Christ Jesus . . . a new creation."<sup>16</sup> For though the appearance of Jesus on the earth was not until "the fulness of the time was come,"<sup>17</sup> yet the act of the Creative Spirit in bringing a New Human Nature into existence must surely have been "in the beginning." What else could have made any process of evolution possible when once the first created human nature had been shattered in the Fall? For all evolution is a process of greater and greater unification, from separate electrons and protons to complex organisms, from isolated family groups to complex civilizations, from mere discrete separateness to infinity variety-in-unity. In a word evolution is "a gathering together of all things in Christ," and is itself a redemptive process, though that process only becomes conscious, and so distinctively moral, in man.

*P.S.*—The above Note was written before the publication of *The Ideas of the Fall; and of Original Sin*, the Brampton Lectures, delivered in 1924, by Dr. N. P. Williams, Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity in the University of Oxford (Longmans, 1927).

<sup>16</sup> 2 Cor. v. 17.

<sup>17</sup> Gal. iv. 4.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE ATONEMENT

WHEN we come to consider the Cross of Christ we need at once to recognize that we are not saved by any theory of the Atonement. It is the *fact* of Christ's death and resurrection (He "died for our sins and rose again for our justification"<sup>1</sup>), and not any theological theory we may formulate about them, by which we are saved. If, before we could enjoy the benefits of the Cross, we had to draw out a theory of the Atonement which would fit harmoniously into the system of our theological opinions, we should be in a bad way. For, as a matter of plain, indisputable, historical fact, there is no such theory. Salvation by the Blood of Jesus is not an intellectual opinion, but a fact of experience. Those who know the power of the Cross might slightly modify the words of St. Paul<sup>2</sup> and say, "We certify you, brethren, that what we say of salvation by the Blood of Jesus is not after man. For we neither received it of man, neither were we taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ." We may learn about the Incarnation "by the message of an Angel"; we can only attain to a right knowledge of the Atonement, and so become partakers of Christ's Resurrection, by first having actual experience of His Cross and Passion.<sup>3</sup> St. Paul goes to the heart of the matter when he says, "I am crucified with Christ."<sup>4</sup>

Yet, true as all this is, it supplies no argument against seeking to formulate, in words, an account of that experience. Indeed, if we are to "preach Christ crucified," we must seek words in which to describe what the death and rising again of Jesus mean to those who, by faith, are sharers in His Death and in His Resurrection Life. And

<sup>1</sup> Collect for 1st Sunday after Easter.

<sup>3</sup> Collect for the Annunciation.

<sup>2</sup> Gal. i. 11, 12.

<sup>4</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

it is our duty to present our teaching in as reasonable a form as possible. The Intellect is not the whole of man's nature, and reason alone, divorced from the affections and the will—if, indeed, any complete divorce of such a kind were possible—could no more establish the truths of religion than it could establish any other truth in the moral or æsthetic sphere. What man can prove, for instance, by merely intellectual processes that his mother was a good woman, that his wife loves him, or that Beethoven's C Minor symphony is superior to the latest piece of clever syncopation? But while reason is not everything, it is much; and we have no right to put needless stumbling blocks in the road of those whose approach to God is mainly intellectual. Some years ago I had posted, on a convenient notice-board near the front door of my Clergy-house, a Good Friday bill showing a picture of the Crucifixion. Going out one day I noticed an intelligent looking young artisan looking earnestly at it. "Well!" I asked, "What do you think of it?" "I don't think anything of it," he replied angrily, "I don't see what good it did to God that His Son should die. And I don't see what good it does me to remember that the noblest man that ever lived came to a shameful death at the end." Well! there you are. That is how the matter presents itself to many people. And to many good people too; for subsequent friendship with the man revealed him as a thoroughly intelligent and earnest young fellow.

The first thing, then, is to show the entire reasonableness of the Atonement. What I mean is that, though we may not be able to reduce the whole matter to a logical proof, we ought to try to show how natural it all is, and how completely it is in line with the rest of our experience. Some years ago<sup>5</sup> I suggested that the best way to treat of the Atonement would be to parody the title of Butler's analogy: *The Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature*, and write "The Analogy of the Cross to the Constitution and Course of Nature." A story will illustrate my meaning. Recently

<sup>5</sup> *Studies in the Cross*, published by Wells, Gardner & Co., Darton, 1914, pp. 11 and 12.



I was very anxious to bring home the lesson of the Cross to a large class of lads, of fifteen to seventeen years old, drawn from the very poorest class of casual labour, and belonging to what is called—though I intensely dislike the term—a Ragged School. So I spent two or three Sundays telling them the story of Mary Schlessor of Calabar, the wonderful Glasgow mill-girl whose life is one of the romances of missionary history. I not only told the story of her life's work, but read large extracts from the book. The boys took fire at once, and readily agreed that we should spend the hour, one Sunday, in discussing the lessons of her life. When the discussion took place I drew the lads' attention to the fact that she had died comparatively young, worn out by work and a bad climate, and asked whether she might not have been wiser to have lived in England, and devoted her time to lecturing on behalf of the Mission, arousing interest and collecting funds, and from time to time sending out to the natives things which they needed. Needless to say all the boys were sure that she could not have done the work she did without going out to Calabar. Then, with the air of one propounding a real difficulty, I asked whether it was not a pity that she lived in a native hut, ate native food, and suffered all the discomforts of native life. Would it not have been better if she had had such a house as white people live in throughout the tropics: a house with broad verandas, cool floor-cloths, bathrooms and mosquito netting, and plenty of native servants? By so doing she would have given them a living example of a nobler, sweeter, more refined life—the life of an English lady. But no. There was no difference of opinion. The boys were comically indignant at the suggestion. "She'd got to live among them, or how could she help them?" "She'd got to be like them, and know what they had to put up with, or she'd never have done them any good." I professed myself convinced by their arguments. But I asked whether, if she'd got to be like them, and share their lives, it would have helped if she too had practised witchcraft, and worshipped idols, and got drunk at the native beer-drinkings. And here it was interesting to watch the conflict in the boys' minds



between a merely logical or verbal difficulty and a deep moral conviction. They had said that she had got to be like her converts and share their lives. Yet they revolted at the idea that she ought to have sinned as they did. At last a boy of seventeen found a form of words, "Not in what's wrong. She'd got to be better than they were, or how could she make them good?" So it comes to this. The lads were, as I have said, quite poor, rough and ill-educated. But the missionary story had touched them deeply, and the natural unspoilt goodness of youth spoke in them. From a saviour they demanded three things:—

- (i) To go to those he or she would save ;
- (ii) to share their lives and sufferings, being "in all things tempted like as they are" ;
- (iii) "yet without sin,"<sup>6</sup> since every saviour has got to be better than those he saves.

But did not these lads instinctively recognize the essentials of every atonement? There is no young man running a Scout Troop, no young woman managing Guides, no social worker of any kind, who does not prove, again and again, that one's power to save is measured by one's power to suffer.

This, indeed, is the great Law of sacrifice:—

There is an Altar I must build,  
Strong and four-square, of rough-hewn stone,  
With bitter labour shaped and laid,  
And I must build it all alone.

No other hand but mine must rear  
That Altar in the secret place,  
Remote, untrod, where even now  
God waits to meet me face to face.

Up the steep, rugged path that leads  
Straight to the place that I desire,  
Yet shrink from, I myself alone  
Must carry knife, and cord, and fire.

<sup>6</sup> Heb. iv. 15.

There is no back but mine must bear  
The faggot up the long incline ;  
The wood of kindling must be laid  
In order by no hand but mine.

“ Who shall provide a lamb ? ” But, nay,  
Why will ye ask ? Is not the plan  
Of sacrifice, by God ordained,  
By God Himself revealed to man ?

There is one law for man and God ;  
Who for another will atone,  
Must bring no sacrifice but self,  
Nor blood of sprinkling but his own.

Indeed, to reject the doctrine of the Atonement because it involves vicarious suffering is to ignore the best teaching of life. At a dinner-hour service, held in a big munition works during the War, an intelligent looking middle-aged man attacked me with great violence for “daring to stand up, in the middle of this awful war, and talk about a loving God, a Heavenly Father.” I adopted a reply I often use. I said, “You’re being very severe on God. Well, fancy yourself endowed with omnipotence, and tell us what you would do. You mustn’t say you’d not let men sin. For that means taking away their Free Will, and so making spiritual beings into machines. But short of that anything ought to be possible for an Almighty God. So fancy that you are God, and tell us what you’d do in His place.” The man replied, “Well! there’s one thing I’d do. I’d not let anyone suffer for anyone’s fault but his own.” “Oh! oh!” I cried, “What a dreadful world! What are you going to do with mothers? Are they to be quite unaffected when their boys make shipwrecks of their lives or their girls come to ruin. Are parents to be quite untouched by the sins of their children, and children feel no shame or sorrow of the parents. It seems to me that your world would have to be a world without love, a world where mothers, and friends, and lovers, and saints, and heroes, and the Cross of Christ would be impossible.” The man was evidently a thoroughly honest fellow. Indeed, with many such men,

the measure of their real goodness and earnestness is the measure of their hatred for, and bitterness against, the Church and Christianity as they conceive, or rather misconceive, them. I often want to say to such men, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup> Anyhow, the man paused for a moment and then said, "There's something in that. I'll have to think about it."

Of course, there is something in it. The fact that we are members one of another is one of the things which should have been for our wealth, but which just for that reason become, in a world of sin, suffering and death, an occasion of falling."<sup>8</sup> But vicarious suffering, the "Law of Christ," by which we "bear one another's burdens," remains God's noblest plan for the salvation of a sin-corrupted world.

If then we recognize that the Cross of Christ is entirely natural, reasonable and in line with every man's daily experience of life and of human nature, we can go on with confidence to seek more light. I am convinced that there can never be a single "Theory" of the Atonement. God's plan of salvation is too vast to be embraced in any one single explanation. It is like some vast cathedral which we must view from without and within, looking east and looking west, indeed from a hundred points of view, before any true idea of it can be gained. The way to study it, I am sure, is not to seek any all-inclusive theory, but to ask ourselves what the death on the Cross meant for the Father and for Christ, what it means to-day for ourselves and for the world.

BUT here I must repeat a caution already given more than once in this book. If we are ever to understand the Cross we must seek to understand Him Who hung upon it. We must, that is to say, find room for all aspects of Christ's nature. If we start by thinking of Jesus merely as a good man, we shall naturally reject, as impossible, anything attributed to Him which "merely a good man" could not do. "No man may deliver his brother, nor make agreement unto God for him; for it cost more to redeem their souls, so that he must let that alone for

<sup>7</sup> Mark xii. 34.

<sup>8</sup> Ps. lxix. 23, P.B.V.

ever.”<sup>9</sup> What then was it in Christ which fitted Him to make an Atonement for the whole race? Surely this, that He was not “a man,” in the sense that I or the reader is a man, but the totality of human nature in a single person. St. Paul says, “For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.”<sup>10</sup> He does not, we may admit, make the parallel assertion that “in Him dwelleth all the fulness of human nature bodily.” But if he does not explicitly state this, he certainly implies it when he calls Christ the Last Adam.<sup>11</sup> For it is clear that St. Paul thinks of Christ as the Head of a new race, the source of a new humanity, a Second Adam.

Now there are two things we must do. We must first ask what this means. And then we must ask what reasons there are for holding it to be true.

First then, what do we mean when we say that the whole of human nature was displayed in Christ in a single person? Well, clearly that is not true of any of us. The most many-sided man does not show, in his single person, all the characteristics found in humanity. And as with individuals, so with nations and races. Some nations show one set of characteristics, and another nation another set. It takes, as we say, all sorts to make a world. But we believe that all powers and possibilities of human nature were in Him.

This assertion, as I know by experience, irritates many people. Some time ago a friend wrote to me, “Why do you persist in claiming every excellence and every ability for Christ? There is no atom of evidence that He had any aliveness to, or sympathy for, all that immense department of human activity which we call the æsthetic realm.” But surely the author of the parable of the Prodigal Son, of the Good Samaritan, of Dives and Lazarus, and of the Five Wise and Five Foolish Virgins, must take rank, even on purely literary grounds, with the great masters of literature. Is it possible to believe that the author of many of the discourses in the gospels, even if we confine ourselves to the first three and ignore the Fourth Gospel, had no eye for beauty, no sense of the æsthetic in nature

<sup>9</sup> Ps. xlix. 7 and 8, P.B.V.

<sup>10</sup> Col. ii. 9.

<sup>11</sup> I Cor. xv. 45.

and in art? The question is not settled by asking, "Was He a great conqueror, or statesman, or scientific discoverer, or author?" and answering "No" to each. Within the limitations of human life—and to those limitations Jesus loyally submitted Himself—no man could be and do all things. Let us rather ask, "What may we say of Him in the moral, the æsthetic and the intellectual spheres?" Of the first, the moral, it is unnecessary to speak. If we except a few daring paradox-mongers like Nietzsche, nineteen centuries are unanimous in hailing Him as the world's greatest moral teacher, and as one Whose life spoke more eloquently even than His words. Within the æsthetic sphere we have fewer data. But in what we have surely the Master stands revealed, the Master of the seeing eye and the powers of perfect expression.

If we discuss—as we may, I am sure, without irreverence—His intellectual powers, dare we, even as a moral philosopher, as one who "knew what was in man," rank Him below Socrates or Plato? And whenever it is a question of a conflict of wits He wins. We see Him as a boy of twelve sitting among the doctors, when "all that heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers,"<sup>12</sup> and as a grown man, when "the Jews marvelled, saying, 'How knoweth this man letters, having never learned?'"<sup>13</sup> and again, during the last week of His life, when the keenest intellects of Jerusalem were pitted against Him, yet "no man was able to answer Him a word, neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask Him any more questions."<sup>14</sup> May we not say that in the intellectual and æsthetic spheres His supremacy is not less than in the moral sphere, though there was less opportunity, as there was certainly less need, to display it?

But all this is hardly to the point. I have discussed it because many people, especially educated and artistic people, seem not merely to overlook, but actually to deny, our Lord's artistic and intellectual powers, and to be correspondingly discouraged and repelled. But the real point is not, "Was He supreme intellectually and æsthetically as well as morally?" but "Was the whole of human

<sup>12</sup> Luke ii. 47.

<sup>13</sup> John vii. 15.

<sup>14</sup> Matthew xxii. 46.



nature represented in His single person?" And that question we may approach along two converging lines of argument.

First, there is no question that men of all types, and races, and nations have found in Him their ideal. Buddhism seems to possess no appeal save for the peoples of Eastern Asia. Mahommet's appeal is wide, yet strictly local; Western Asia and Africa seem to be its natural limits. All men find themselves in Christ. The reader knows, of course, that Jesus was born a Jew, of the tribe of Judah. Does he, when saying his prayers, ever think of Jesus as a Jew? If he *knows* that He was a Jew, does he not *feel* that He was an Englishman? So, too, the Kaffir boys I preached to during my short time in South Africa could tell me all about Bethlehem of Judea, and about the village home in Nazareth of Galilee. But in their heart of hearts they felt sure He was a Kaffir like themselves, and while they prayed they knew, I am sure, that He is black. And the Chinaman finds Him a Chinaman, the Eskimo an Eskimo, and the Papuan a Papuan. And all are right.

But there is a second line of argument. As all men find themselves in Him, so it takes all men of all nations to display all "the fulness of Him that filleth all in all."<sup>15</sup> It is not merely that no single man can display in himself all the character of Christ, nor illustrate in his life and actions all elements of Christ's teaching. No single nation can do it. I remember hearing the late Canon J. M. Wilson, when he was Archdeacon of Rochdale, say that we should never really know what Christianity is till we see it displayed in all nations. The "fulness of Christ" displayed only in Europeans, and people in America of European extraction, is like a great symphony played only on the brass instruments, with strings and wood-wind and drums omitted. The Greek could live, and display in his living, all that was in Aristotle; the Chinaman all that was in Confucius. It takes all the human race to display all that is in Jesus.

Let me try to illustrate this by a few examples. What does "Resist not evil," or "Love your enemies, bless them

<sup>15</sup> Eph. i. 23.



that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them that despitefully use you and persecute you,"<sup>16</sup> really mean to any Englishman? Yet if any one will read, in Maxim Gorky's unpleasant collection of stories called *Twenty-six Men and a Girl*, the wonderful transcript from life entitled "My Fellow-Traveller," he will recognize an attitude of mind, displayed most clearly perhaps in this story, but to be met with again and again in Tolstoy, and Dostoevsky, and Turgenev, which suggests that a deeply converted Russia would give these sayings a meaning. And what aspects of Christ's teaching may not be made real for the world when the dignity of the Chinaman, the self-sacrifice of the Japanese, the passionate religious fervour of the African, the spiritual genius of the Hindoo, are claimed for Him and developed and brought to perfection by the Spirit, the Giver of Life?

But I must not develop this further. What I want to insist on, here and now, is that if we are to arrive at a right attitude towards the Atonement we must first arrive at a right judgment of Jesus Christ. We must strive to realize that He was, indeed, "Perfect Man," all the fulness of human nature displayed in a single Person. In Him the whole race is summed up and epitomized. But if that is so it should not be impossible to answer some of the questions which arise in connection with the Atonement.

*What was the significance of the Cross for God the Father?* Well, what did God desire when He created man? What does He desire of man now? Surely there can be but one answer. God desired, and still desires, to see humanity perfect, complete, sinless and utterly surrendered to His will. This is what man was created for, namely, to be indwelt by God, and to find his perfect happiness, and highest development, in joyful free surrender to, and co-operation with, the will of God. There is perhaps no truth of religion which can be more certainly verified by experience than the truth that the more entirely a man surrenders his will to the control of the Holy Spirit the more he finds his true self. For "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty,"<sup>17</sup> even the "glorious liberty of the children of

<sup>16</sup> Matt. v. 39 and 44.

<sup>17</sup> 2 Cor. iii. 17.

God.”<sup>18</sup> I once heard an old Wesleyan local preacher, speaking in the open air, express this truth very simply and beautifully. He said, “It just comes to this, brothers; God just suits me and I suit him.” And the late Rev. J. W. Rideout, who was my colleague for some years, expressed the same truth when he said, in a sermon. “There is nothing so native to man as God; nor anywhere where he is so entirely at home.” Yet from the time when man fell God never saw one single human being living this life of perfect freedom and joy in God. “They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.”<sup>19</sup> Only in Jesus, only in One Who could say with truth, “My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me,” could God the Father see man as He desired to see him, and only from such an one could He receive the one thing which He can desire, the one thing which a creature can give or withhold as he pleases, namely, the sacrifice of self. And we shall see later (p. 106) that that offering is the one which Christ still offers to the Father before the Throne. There should be no difficulty in finding an answer to our question. What offering can the reader bring to God? What has he to offer? Clearly nothing but himself, his own loving obedience and service. Alas, that this offering should be so poor and defiled. But perfect or imperfect it is all man has to give, and all God desires. And the marvel of it is that the Creator desires this gift, and the creature can deny Him and withhold it if he will. But Christ offered a perfect offering because it was the surrender of a complete humanity in all its fulness, perfectly sinless, perfectly surrendered to the Father’s will, and the surrender was carried to its fullest completeness, even to death.

*What was the significance of the Cross to Christ Himself?* It seems to me that we have already answered that. Man’s power to save is, in this fallen and distracted world, measured by his power to suffer. I cannot and must not say that it is impossible to fail with anyone if only you love that person enough, for everyone possesses Free Will, and some sinners resist even the boundless love of God.

<sup>18</sup> Rom. viii. 21.

<sup>19</sup> Rom. iii. 12.

But surely we must all have recognized, at some time in life, that our failure to help and save some fellow-sinner has been due to just this, that we have not cared about him enough. Often I have failed with lads. I do not deny for a moment that the lads have been to blame. But I say to myself, "If I had cared more; if his wrong-doing had made me more unhappy than it did; if I had been able to *bear his griefs and to carry his sorrows*<sup>20</sup> more, I might have saved him." When Isaiah says, of Jehovah's suffering Servant, "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed,"<sup>21</sup> he is describing, more or less, every servant of God, every servant of humanity. I say again, a man's power to save is measured by his power to suffer; and this is a fact of experience verified in a hundred thousand lives every day of every week.

Yet, while we emphasize this fact, I think we ought also to emphasize the truth that such suffering is really the highest joy. It may seem a violent paradox to suggest that pain and sorrow can ever be in themselves joy. But there is a sentence in the late Dr. Illingworth's essay, in *Lux Mundi*, which has always seemed to me supremely suggestive. It runs, "We are led on to wonder whether, 'in the light that no man can approach unto,' where the Three are One, some higher analogue of what we call sacrifice does not for ever flame; whose radiant reflection on the universe only becomes shadow when it falls on a world of sin." And even in this world we may recognize pain and sorrow, if not as positive goods, at least as necessary elements in the highest goods. I think we should take the text, "Jesus . . . Who for the joy that was set before Him endured the Cross, despising the shame,"<sup>22</sup> quite literally. I believe it means that the joy of saving a world was so great that He hardly felt the physical agony, or the mental shame. There is a passage in Macaulay's *History* which is worth quoting.<sup>23</sup> It is the account of the flogging of "Julian" Johnson under James II.: "Three hundred and

<sup>20</sup> Isaiah liii. 4.

<sup>22</sup> Heb. xii. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Isaiah liii. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Macaulay's *History*, Chap. VI.

seventeen stripes were laid on ; but the sufferer never winced. He afterwards said that the pain was cruel, but that, as he was dragged at the tail of the cart, he remembered how patiently the Cross had been borne up Mount Calvary, and was so much supported by the thought that, but for the fear of incurring the suspicion of vainglory, he would have sung a psalm with as firm and cheerful a voice as if he had been worshipping God in the congregation." And many other examples of the same sort of thing could be quoted. My point is this. The strength of an alkali is measured by the amount of acid which it will neutralize. The temperature of a given weight of iron is measured by the weight of ice which it will melt. So, too, in spiritual things. The power of love is measured by the amount of what is painful, tedious and disagreeable which it can turn into something absolutely desirable. A mother nursing a sick child may have to sit up for weary hours, to do a thousand painful and unpleasant things, and, in a word, to put up with much to which money would never tempt her. But she not merely does it all. She loves to do it, and would be indignant at the idea that she should surrender her place by the sick-bed to a paid nurse.

We see the same thing in matters of less moment. What day labourer, paid so much an hour, would consent to go through a tenth part of what an Alpine climber endures in his efforts to reach some hitherto unconquered peak ? What price per hour would hire men to go through what sixteen university Blues go through every year in rowing from Putney to Mortlake ? Indeed, we might almost say that the highest pleasure is indissolubly linked with some kind of pain, self-sacrifice or effort. The Rugby football player, the Arctic explorer, the martyr, are in many respects different. Yet they all, as it were, fall into one class ; and we may, without irreverence, say that for the joy that is set before them they endure, despising the suffering and pain. And, the greater and nobler the end aimed at, the greater the suffering and agony that can be not only endured but, as it were, annihilated and made as if it were not.

If we keep this truth in mind, it does not matter how much we dwell on the physical sufferings of Christ. Rather

the more we dwell on them the better, since we can say—"How great must have been the joy that was set before Him, the joy of saving a world, if it could make such sufferings as these a matter of little moment." And this treatment of the whole story of the Crucifixion leads to the presentation of religion as a glorious adventure, which makes great claims on a man's strength and courage, but offers correspondingly great rewards. Nor must we allow ourselves to think of the Crucifixion as if it were a defeat which the triumph of Easter morning put right. Rather we should think of the whole drama of the Passion as the record of a long series of victories. I owe this thought to a young Manchester man, of no more than elementary school education, one of my parish-workers, who was speaking for me, on Good Friday afternoon, in the street. He said, "I don't want you people to think of Good Friday as a sad day. It was a sad day *once*, and for *One*. But for us it is a day of solemn triumph. And don't think that it was a day of defeat, and then Easter Day came and put things right. No, indeed! Jesus was a Conqueror all along. First He conquered Himself, and His own natural shrinking in the Garden. Then He conquered pain when He prayed, 'Father forgive them,' as the nails went through. Then He conquered hard-hearted impenitence in the Thief on the Cross. And then He conquered all the powers of Evil in the Hours of Darkness. Death was only 'the last enemy that shall be overcome'!"

*What is the significance of the Cross to the Individual Believer?* Volumes have, of course, been written on this subject, and fresh volumes we may be sure will continue to appear as long as the world stands. But my desire is merely to touch on a few outstanding facts. It will, therefore, be enough to notice two aspects of the effect of the Cross of Christ on the individual sinner. They are these:—

(a) It moves him to repentance. Every social and religious worker comes, sooner or later (and the sooner the better), to recognize the voluntary element in all sin. People sin because the desire to live righteously is lacking. I wonder how many score of times I have been asked by



some working-woman to "speak to my husband, and tell him to be different," or to "give our John Willie a good talking to, as he is growing up bad." But too often I effect nothing with the man or the lad. The will to amend is absent. If now we ask what it is that has power to move the will, and to supply that desire for amendment of life which is lacking, there can surely be but one reply. The personal appeal of someone who loves the sinner enough to suffer for him, and with him, is all powerful. I would refer again to the story, told in Chapter VI., of the man who said of the curate, "If I'm worth that to any man, I'm worth something yet. I'll have another try." I believe these words, transferred from any earthly friend or helper and applied to our Blessed Saviour Himself, do really represent very accurately one aspect of the appeal of the Cross. "If I am worth *that* to Him, I am worth something yet. I'll have another try." The love of Christ constraineth us.<sup>24</sup>

(b) But there is a very different aspect of the Cross of Christ in relation to the individual. One often hears critics of the Atonement say that no atonement between God and man is necessary except repentance on the part of the sinner. "What," such critics ask, "can a God of infinite love require beyond repentance on the part of the dearly loved child?" But this surely is a very shallow view of the whole matter. For part of the atoning work of Christ is just the making repentance possible. We need surely to recognize three effects of sin on the sinner. Firstly, the affections are corrupted, so that sin, which at first was approached with shrinking, loses its hideousness and becomes attractive, till after many falls into sin a man comes to the state in which he will not merely "commit such things . . . but have pleasure in them that do them."<sup>25</sup> Secondly, the judgment is perverted and the eyes blinded, so that a true estimate of moral values is no longer possible, even when desired. "Mine iniquities have taken hold upon me, so that I am not able to look up."<sup>26</sup> Thirdly, the will is weakened. "For to will is present with me; but

<sup>24</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.<sup>25</sup> Rom. i. 32.<sup>26</sup> Psalm xl. 12.



how to perform that which is good I find not.”<sup>27</sup> What then does the penitent sinner feel that he needs? He wants a deepened love of holiness, a clearer vision, a braced will. And all these Christ has. Everyday experience proves that what we go through leaves its traces on our characters. What would be the strength, the beauty, the holiness of any one who had gone through one hundredth part of what Christ endured? And while the greatest and noblest of Christian martyrs did but endure it bravely, Christ, we believe, voluntarily accepted it, and (so to speak), grappled it to Him, and would not let it pass Him by, and all for love of us. The penitent sinner can say of Christ, “He has all that I need.”

But the sinner needs something more than the fruits of victory. If his repentance is deep and sincere he feels and knows that he deserves to suffer. In the life of a great evangelical missionary, still alive, I find these words, “His old idea (*i.e.* before his conversion) had been that it was a debasing view to take of God that He demanded this death on the Cross as a sacrifice for our sins. Now he began to feel that even if God did not require such a sacrifice, he himself did, and that nothing else would bring home to him the horror of sin, and the satisfaction of forgiveness.” I am sure that this is true. Much of the difficulty which people have in believing in the Atonement to-day is due to the fact that they have a superficial idea of sin, and, therefore, a low idea of holiness. Only when a man rightly estimates the sinfulness of sin, and begins to understand the nature of God’s claims on our obedience and love, can he look at Christ and say, “He has done all I ought to do.”

But, it will be objected, it is still Christ, not the sinner, who has the fruits of victory; still Christ, not the sinner, who has paid the price due. Where is the justice of God if I am to be counted righteous because of another person’s virtues, and forgiven because another person has paid the penalty? But people who argue like this forget that there is no such forgiveness, nor accounting righteous, without faith. But faith is not a “bare intellectual assent.” The

<sup>27</sup> Rom. vii. 18.

faith that saves the entire man is the work of the entire man. It is a movement of a man's entire personality, working through the three activities of knowledge, love and will. The mind recognizes Christ for all we need ; the affections love Him for being all we need ; the will chooses Him as all we need. But, where all this takes place, it is not only allowable for God's justice to hold the sinner righteous for Christ's sake ; His justice must, and ought to, do so. For it is an elementary principle of ethics and of law that a man is judged not by what he succeeds in doing, but by what he *would do if he could* (i.e. by his motives, not his deeds). If, looking at Christ on the Cross, the sinner can say—"However many times I fail, that is what I would be if I could"—if, so to speak, he "means Christ," then God's justice may well count him righteous for Christ's sake.

And there is still one factor of the problem, and that the greatest of all, to be considered. I mean the mystical union of the soul with Christ. Now I should not be surprised if some of my readers are startled by the expression "mystical union," for one hears little of this great doctrine from the pulpit to-day. Yet three things can unquestionably be said of it. First, it is the dominating thought in all St. Paul's epistles. Secondly, it is the basis on which rest the chief Christian doctrines, such as those of the Atonement, the Sacraments, and the work of the Holy Spirit. And, thirdly, the doctrine stares us in the face in the Book of Common Prayer. What, then, is the doctrine ?

We may best get an answer by asking, "If man's nature is indeed in some way perverted and corrupt, what does he require ?" Clearly there can be put one answer, namely, "A New Nature." But can the nature of a living thing be changed ? Certainly it can, as St. Paul teaches us. No cultivation, pruning, manuring nor training will change a crab-apple tree into a sweet-apple tree. But grafting will do it. A new nature is introduced, so to speak, from outside. This, according to St. Paul (only he speaks of an olive tree rather than an apple tree), is a picture of the work of the Holy Ghost introducing into us a new nature. And what sort of nature must it be ? It must be a true human

nature, for none other will suit us. Yet it must not be the old corrupt nature which derives from Adam, or it will itself be corrupted. It must be already strengthened against temptation by victorious resistance, or we may fail again after it has been raised up in us. It must be filled with the Holy Spirit, for it seems to be the purpose for which human nature exists that it should be indwelt by God. The more we examine the question, "What sort of nature does man need?" the more we shall find that it is the nature of Christ that he needs, and that must be raised up in him. And St. Paul wearies himself to find ever new ways of expressing this intimate union of the redeemed soul with Christ. We are "in Christ Jesus." He is "raised up in us." Those who have been baptized have "put on Christ." Nay, more, he declares what is the end of our warfare. It is that we may be able to say, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

And clearly this is the doctrinal basis of our prayer-book. The baptized child is to have the "old man" (*i.e.* the old nature) done away, and the new man raised up in him. He is regenerate and grafted into that Church which is the Body of Christ. And this new life is awakened into consciousness at our conversion; strengthened by its original giver, the Holy Ghost, at confirmation; fed at every communion; and brought to completion in every man when he can say, "It is no longer I, but Christ liveth in me." Apart from this mystical union with Christ no system of theology is possible. In that truly great book, *The Atonement*, by R. W. Dale, these two truths, our need and Christ's perfect work, are wonderfully displayed. But they are like the twin spans of a great arch which lack the keystone that alone can unite them and enable them to stand firm, because Dale did not fully understand that mystical union with Christ which finds its perfect expression in the sacramental life. I do not mean that such a saint as Dale did not experience that union. But his theology found no expression for it.

Take away, then, the doctrine that the old nature, the fallen nature of man, can be done away and the new nature, the perfect nature of Christ, raised up in its place, and the

whole scheme of Christian theology falls into ruin. Accept that great truth, and the doctrine of the Atonement presents little difficulty, and the doctrine of the Sacraments follows as a necessary corollary. For grace, "the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," is the perfect human nature of Christ, and if anyone, reading the New Testament, will substitute for the word "grace," whenever it occurs, the phrase "perfect human nature of Jesus Christ," he will be astonished to see how it illuminates the writer's thought.

*What is the significance of the Cross for the human race?*

This thought of grace as the perfect *human* nature of Christ will suggest an answer to our last question. God can create a perfect and sinless human nature. But not God Himself can create a free spiritual nature *incapable of sinning*. For that would involve a contradiction, and God, Who is as much the God of Reason as He is the God of Goodness and of Beauty, cannot be the Author of a contradiction. We touch here an old and familiar truth of philosophy and theology, which recognizes three degrees:—

- (a) Animals have no Free Will *and so are unable to sin (non posse peccare)*.
- (b) Men have Free Will, but a corrupted and divided nature, *and so are able to sin (posse peccare)*.
- (c) God, and fully sanctified men, have Free Will, and a perfect and unified nature, *and so are able not to sin (posse non peccare)*.

But, at any rate in created beings, that state of unified nature is the result of freely exercised choice, or, to express the same thought in the same words, is the result of victorious resistance to temptation. When God created man a Fall was not necessary; the possibility of a Fall, we may believe, was. Had God merely offered us, through the action of His Creative Spirit, a new nature in place of the old fallen one, we might have been regenerate (born again) and then fallen again. But He offers us a new nature which has been worn by His Son ("For as many as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ")<sup>28</sup> and which His Son has strengthened against all temptation. Indeed, I know few ways of studying the Passion more

<sup>28</sup> Gal. iii. 27.

fruitful than that of following Christ step by step from Gethsemane to the Tomb, and asking oneself, at each stage, "Against what temptation is He here strengthening that nature which shall one day be mine? What fruits of victory is He now winning for me and all men?"

I cannot close this chapter without disclaiming all idea of having attempted a theory of the Atonement. I have merely tried to look at the Cross of Jesus, now from one side and now from another, and to note its entire congruity with the needs of our entire nature. I cannot doubt that my readers, as they too watch by the Cross, will get gleams of light which, just because they have been granted to them themselves, will be of greater value than anything I have been able to suggest.

## CHAPTER IX

### THE RESURRECTION

THE Resurrection of Jesus Christ is undoubtedly the central doctrine of the Christian religion. "If Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain."<sup>1</sup> Yet it is probable that many Christians would have no little difficulty in saying exactly what they mean when they say "Christ is Risen." On the one hand, they clearly do not mean that Jesus was simply restored to life as the gospels say the widow's son, and Jairus' daughter, and Lazarus were restored. On the other hand, they surely ought to mean something more, much more, than that the personality of Jesus has survived death. It is true that there is a school of writers in the Church to-day which refuses to attach to the doctrine of the Resurrection of Christ any meaning other than that of His continued existence after death. But there are three grave objections to such teaching. Firstly, it is quite clearly not the view held by the first generation of Christians. St. Paul, as a Pharisee, must have believed in the continued existence, after death, of the personalities who on earth bore the names of Abraham, Moses and Isaiah. Yet it is impossible to believe that when he preached "Jesus and the Resurrection"<sup>2</sup> at Athens he was affirming no more than he would have been prepared to affirm of any of the patriarchs or prophets. And the same surely is true of the other Apostles, when "with great power gave they witness of the Resurrection of the Lord Jesus."<sup>3</sup> And secondly, such a view of the Resurrection is quite irreconcilable with the plain words of Holy Scripture and of the Creeds which agree in placing the Resurrection on "the third day."<sup>4</sup> But the continuance of a personality after death is not an event,

<sup>1</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 14.

<sup>2</sup> Acts xvii. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Acts iv. 33.

<sup>4</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 4 and all three Creeds.



confined to a single day, but a condition which continues, and which in the case of Christ began at the moment of His death on the Cross. And thirdly, there is, and always has been, a name for the doctrine of the survival of personality after death. It is the doctrine of the Immortality of the Soul. There is no justification for transferring the name of the doctrine of the Resurrection and applying it to quite a different doctrine, namely, that of the Immortality of the Soul. The subject is sufficiently important to call for quite plain speaking. Those who claim for Christ no more than that He enjoys a continuance of personal existence after death, ought not to say "Christ is Risen." For as Christians they believe that Queen Victoria also enjoys "the continued existence of personality after death." But they would never dream of saying, "Queen Victoria is risen from the dead." It would surely be better to say clearly, "We do not believe in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We claim no more for Him than this, that He enjoys that continued existence after death which we believe to be the common lot of all men."

But if, when we affirm that Christ is risen, we mean neither that He returned to the ordinary conditions of daily life, nor merely that His personality has survived death, what exactly do we mean? That is our problem.

In seeking an answer we must distinguish clearly between the historic proof of Christ's Resurrection and its theological and philosophical explication. The Church believes in His Resurrection not because it can be made to appear reasonable, or can be fitted into any particular scheme of doctrine, or into any particular scientific view of the world, but (a) because she believes that God "showed Him openly, not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead" (Acts x. 40, 41); and (b) because the spiritual experience of her members for nineteen centuries appears to testify to an active intercourse of souls with Christ such as does not exist between one human soul and another even in life, and still less between a living human being and one that is dead. If a man finds the historic evidence unsatisfactory, and attaches no weight to the

second class of evidence, he will in honesty be compelled to deny the Resurrection of Christ, or at least to declare it "not proven."

But if a man accepts the fact of Christ's Resurrection he is entitled, nay, compelled, to go on and ask: What does this mean? What does it imply? And here surely we may claim, as St. Paul obviously does in 1 Cor. xv. 35-44, that analogy from the processes of Nature is one source of the "data" of theology. We are justified in claiming that "the invisible things . . . are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made" (Rom. i. 20). But what truths may be learnt from the sowing, decay and growth of a grain of wheat as described by St. Paul? Surely the following:—

1. That in the seemingly lifeless grain of corn there is *a principle of life*, a wheaten soul, so to speak, dormant yet capable of being roused into activity.

2. That if and when so roused this principle of life, this soul, will naturally and inevitably clothe itself in a body. The wheaten "life" will give rise to a wheaten plant, complete with root, stalk, leaves and full ear of corn.

3. That though the new plant which grows will not be the *same* plant from which the grain of wheat came, since "thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may be of wheat, or of some other grain," yet in a sense it will be the *same* plant, since (a) it will be of the same type, a grain of wheat producing a wheat plant, and not a cabbage or a raspberry bush; and (b) it is the expression of and the result of the same vital principle. "God giveth it a body, as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed its own body."

What analogies may we legitimately trace between the resurrection of a soul and the germinating of a grain of corn *if we have first accepted the truth of the doctrine of the resurrection of the soul on historical grounds?* Surely the following:—

1. That there is a soul, or principle of life, in every man, which, when the body in which it is at present incarnated dies, is capable of remaining in a condition of suspended

animation for an indefinite period (the doctrine of the disembodied state).

2. That when aroused it will become active again and proceed to clothe itself with a body (doctrine of human immortality).

3. That the body so assumed, though *not* the old fleshly body which decayed in the grave, nor composed of the same or similar material particles, will yet be a true, complete and human body, inasmuch as it will be the expression of, and result of, a human soul (doctrine of the resurrection of the body).

If now we ask what we may legitimately affirm about the Resurrection of Christ, I would suggest the following points:—

1. As Christ was in the intermediate state only from late on Friday evening till dawn on Easter Day, His body “saw not corruption.” When He rose from the dead His body changed (as St. Paul declares will be the case with the bodies of those who “are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord” (1 Thess. iv. 15)), “in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye.”

2. That as soon as He passed out of that state of suspended, or partially suspended, activity which we call death, His soul necessarily clothed itself with a body, so that He could truly say, “Handle Me, and see; for a spirit” (*i.e.* ghost<sup>5</sup>) “hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have” (St. Luke xxiv. 39).

3. That His resurrection body was different from that which hung on the Cross, and was laid in the tomb, inasmuch as it could pass through doors which had been “shut . . . for fear of the Jews,” could appear and disappear, and could pass from one place to another apart from ordinary methods of locomotion. In other words, it was a spiritual, not a material, body. So the Church teaches, not only of Christ, but of us too, the resurrection of the body. It is not possible to exaggerate the vital importance

<sup>5</sup> I take ghosts, for the actual appearance of which there appears to me to be ample evidence, to be merely mental apparitions produced by the telepathic action of mind on mind.

and high value of that doctrine. For it carries with it the assurance that the future life will be no cold, emasculated thought-life, but a full human life in which the whole of man's nature, sensation, emotion, will and intellect will all play their part. Our resurrection will be the resurrection of the entire man.

It would be interesting, at this point, to discuss the doctrine of the Resurrection of the Body in some detail, in view of the frequent assertions, which one meets with to-day, that educated men can no longer believe in a bodily resurrection, and that the Church must reject—and, indeed, has already rejected<sup>6</sup>—the doctrine. But anything like a full discussion of the subject would take us too far from our main topic, namely, the Resurrection of Jesus. It will be enough to say that, if those who make the assertion mean no more than that the Church must reject belief in a physical resurrection, the resurrection of a material body, the Church can hardly be called on to reject an article which could never rightly have formed part of her faith. I am not, of course, denying that distinguished theologians in the past have asserted belief in a physical resurrection. But I do say that such a belief could never rightly have formed part of the Church's faith since it is explicitly denied in Holy Scripture. For St. Paul says,<sup>7</sup> "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption." If denial of this article of the Creed means more than the denial of the resurrection of a gross physical body and denies any sense or meaning to the affirmation, "And I believe in . . . the Resurrection of the Body," we may well ask objectors to state quite clearly and explicitly both why they deny the existence of a spiritual body, and how they themselves conceive of a future life. Clearly it will not do for them to reply, "We are quite unable to conceive of the conditions of the life to come." For to say, "We know, and can conceive, nothing about the conditions of the future life; but we do know that they are not such as the Church for the last nineteen centuries has declared them to be," is too glaring a contradiction.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. *The Modern Churchman*, July 1927.

<sup>7</sup> 1 Cor. xv. 50.

If then we have a clear idea of what we mean when we say that Christ rose again the third day, and if we are persuaded that there is nothing contrary to the teachings of modern science, or to intrinsic probability, in belief in the resurrection of a spiritual body, we can go on to examine the gospel evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. I do not want to do this myself. It will be far more valuable if each of my readers does it for himself. But a few suggestions as to principles and methods will be useful. The assertion, so often and so confidently made, that it is impossible to reconcile the various narratives of the Resurrection, is quite certainly untrue. Different reconstructions of the story, by different writers, may differ. In that case not all, and quite possibly none, will be entirely correct. But if *any* narrative can be constructed which does not ignore or contradict any of the data supplied by the gospel narratives, then those narratives are clearly not self-contradictory. I would repeat that any particular reconstruction which is suggested need not necessarily be accurate in every detail. The accounts we possess are not exhaustive, and some of the facts narrated may be capable of two or more explanations. My point is that there is nothing in the accounts given in the four gospels, and in 1 Cor. xv. 4-8, which cannot be woven into a perfectly coherent story.

Such a coherent story the reader should try to construct for himself. It is well to purchase a *Harmony of the Gospels*, showing the various accounts of each event in parallel columns on a single page.<sup>8</sup> The first step is to recognize that what we are to study is not the behaviour of a single group of persons, described for us in a continuous story, but the confused and hurried action of a number of persons, and groups of persons, who appear and disappear like people in a tragedy who are one moment in the limelight, and the next moment pass off the stage and are replaced by others; the whole lot coming and going, speaking a few words and dropping out of the dialogue, and engaged generally in confused and dis-

<sup>8</sup> S.P.C.K. publishes a cheap *Harmony of the Four Gospels*, by J. M. Fullar, price 2s.



tracted action. In fact, it is just exactly the sort of story we should expect. Anyone who has made an attempt to read the history of any period in contemporary memoirs, diaries and letters, will know what I mean. Try to reconstruct the events of the St. Bartholomew massacre, or of any event connected with the French Revolution, such as the October march of the women on Versailles (1789), or the September massacres (1792), and you will soon realize how true to life the gospel stories are, and also how free they are from the glaring contradictions or impossibilities which usually meet us in history.

A good way of attacking our task is by recognizing the various groups of actors, each of which has to be followed from the evening of Holy Thursday to the evening of Easter Day. They are:—

- (i) *The nine apostles* who forsook Jesus and fled. Where did they stay, when in Jerusalem? Was it in the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, where the Last Supper was eaten? Or in various houses in Jerusalem, with friends?
- (ii) *St. Peter and "that other disciple"* (St. John) who, after the first panic, returned and followed Jesus to the house of the High Priest. St. John stood at the foot of the Cross during the Crucifixion. Where was St. Peter? As St. John was with the small group of women at the foot of the Cross, was St. Peter among the larger group of women who stood "looking on, afar off?"<sup>9</sup> And where did they lodge while at Jerusalem? St. John certainly in his own house; St. Peter probably with him, since Mary Magdalene found them together, and apparently apart from the other apostles, on Easter morning.
- (iii) *The "many women . . . which followed Jesus from Galilee,"*<sup>10</sup> who stood afar off. Joanna and Susanna<sup>11</sup> would almost certainly be among the number. Nor is it likely that Mary, the mother of

<sup>9</sup> Mark xv. 40.

<sup>10</sup> Matt. xxvii. 55.

<sup>11</sup> Luke viii. 3.



Mark, would be absent, though she was a woman of Jerusalem and not one up from Galilee. Some of the women may have lodged at her house.

(iv) *Those who "stood by the Cross of Jesus,"*<sup>12</sup> namely, the Blessed Virgin, her sister Salome, Mary, the wife of Cleophas (mother of St. Matthew), and Mary Magdalene. These, it would seem, at first, stood at a distance with the others, but greater love or greater courage compelled them to push through the noisy crowds of onlookers and of rough soldiers, and to take their stand actually at the foot of the Cross. We know that the Virgin Mary lodged with St. John that night and after. Would her sister and her sister-in-law leave her after such a day of trial? Surely not. And John, xx. 2, makes it not improbable that Mary Magdalene had also lodged that night at St. John's house, and that when, at the sight of the empty tomb, she turned and ran at once, leaving the others standing in doubt and bewilderment, it was to tell the Blessed Virgin rather than the apostles.

It will be necessary not merely to follow the movements of the different actors in the drama, but to try and discover the right order of events. Thus the women could not leave Jerusalem till the gates were opened at dawn, and the expression "early, when it was yet dark," used in John xx. 1, may well be the apostle's recollection rather of the time at which she and Salome left the house to meet the other women, than a statement of the time when she actually reached the sepulchre. But the Resurrection took place at dawn. Hence there would be no actual eye-witnesses except the soldiers. At this point I may mention a curious detail. Thinking about the fact that none but the soldiers saw the descent of the Angel, I was suddenly arrested by the thought, "Then how did St. Matthew know about it, since he himself tells us that the soldiers took

<sup>12</sup> John xix. 25.

'large money' to tell a false story of theft of the body by the disciples?" I turned up the passage (Matt. xxviii. 11-15) and found, of course, that the evangelist does not say so. He says, "Some of the watch." Here we find an example of something we shall constantly meet with in the drama of the Passion and the Resurrection, namely, that the same event affects different people differently. Of two thieves, one is softened to repentance, the other hardened. Of "many women," four are bold enough to press round the Cross; most "stand afar off." Of a number of Roman soldiers, some are hardened, and take a bribe to tell a false tale; some apparently are converted and are St. Matthew's source for his account. The women at the tomb separate into two groups, the timid who "fled from the sepulchre; for they trembled and were amazed, neither said they anything to any man, for they were afraid,"<sup>13</sup> and the bold who "departed quickly from the sepulchre, with fear and great joy, and did run to bring the disciples word,"<sup>14</sup> Here, too, it is worth noticing that St. Matthew, who tells us that the woman did bring the apostles word, is the son of Mary, the wife of Cleophas, who both stood bravely at the foot of the Cross, and was probably one of those who lodged with the Blessed Virgin at the house of St. John, along with St. Peter; while Mark, who depicts the women as too terrified to speak, is the son of "Mary, the mother of Mark," who, if she was at the Crucifixion, as we may surely suppose her to have been, timidly stood afar off, and in whose house the incredulous nine may possibly have lodged. Did each evangelist get his account from his own mother, and do those accounts reflect the memories of those busy actors in the drama?

But I must not pursue the story further. I do not want to go into further detail. I want each of my readers to study the New Testament accounts and make his or her own harmony. For I am deeply convinced of two things. The first is that the radical scepticism which marks so many handlings of the Resurrection narratives is quite without justification, and if displayed by historians dealing with secular history would be recognized as absurd. And

<sup>13</sup> Mark xvi. 8.

<sup>14</sup> Matt. xxviii. 8.

the second is that a careful study of the subject, with the help of as few books as possible, except the New Testament itself, and under the guidance of no teacher but the Holy Spirit, will enormously deepen faith in the historical accuracy of the gospel story of the Resurrection.

## CHAPTER X

### THE ASCENDED CHRIST AND THE SACRAMENTS

THE Ascension, notwithstanding that Ascension Day is one of the four great feasts of the Church's Year, of equal dignity with Christmas, Easter and Whitsun Day, is too little thought of and regarded by Christian people. This is because it is treated as a mere pendant to the Resurrection. That is a mistake. It is, of course, the end of our Blessed Lord's life on earth, under the conditions of Time and Space; and it marks the completion of God's original plan of Creation, namely, the reception of Human Nature, the created image of the Uncreated God, perfect, complete and sanctified, into Heaven. And so it is the end of a dispensation, and the true Festival Day of Human Nature. But it is more than that. It, rather than Whitsun Day, is the beginning of a new dispensation, that of Christ working, not under the limitations of Time and Space, but "timelessly" and "spacelessly" by His Holy Spirit; and it is the beginning of the long process by which God, having made the Captain of our Salvation perfect through suffering, goes on to bring many sons unto glory.<sup>1</sup> It will be our task, in this chapter, to enquire how Christ works, since His Ascension, in such a way that it was expedient for us that He should go away,<sup>2</sup> and, secondly, what is the nature of that "redemption which is in Christ Jesus."<sup>3</sup>

Before we discuss the doctrine of the Ascension we must consider the fact. For there is no article of the Creed more attacked to-day. The arguments against it seem to be:—

- (a) That there is no need for any such doctrine, since the Resurrection was Christ's passing into the future state, and no further passing is needed or possible.

<sup>1</sup> Heb. ii. 10.

<sup>2</sup> John xvi. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Rom. iii. 24.

- (b) That no Ascension, other than the Resurrection, is mentioned in the gospels, or would have been thought of by the Church if the Acts had not contained a reference to Christ's "being seen of the apostles forty days."<sup>4</sup>
- (c) That modern views of the universe render the idea of an "Ascension" meaningless; and that
- (d) Modern believers in the doctrine are compelled to attach to it a forced interpretation quite different from any that primitive Christians could have held.

I must, for a moment, defer consideration of the first objection. Of the others we may say:—

(b) St. Mark does briefly refer to an Ascension,<sup>5</sup> and the fact that the gospel was either never finished, or that at any rate we do not possess the verses with which it originally closed, deprives the objection of all force as far as this, the most primitive of the gospels, is concerned.

St. Luke writes fully of it in the Acts, and the idea that when he wrote the gospel (probably A.D. 56-58) he knew nothing of the *Great Forty Days*, and that when he wrote the Acts (A.D. 59-61) he had heard of, and accepted, that belief, is surely preposterous. The end of the gospel of St. Luke bears all the marks of a compressed and somewhat hurried summary of matter which the author means to elaborate in his next treatise.

Critics believe that the author of the fourth gospel knew the third gospel<sup>6</sup>—and so, presumably, the Book of the Acts—and it is, therefore, difficult to believe that he was ignorant of the tradition of a forty days' sojourn in time and space on the part of the Risen Christ, or of its termination by the Ascension, or that he would have been silent on the subject if he disbelieved it.

As for St. Matthew, each reader must form his own views.

For myself, I can only say that the more I study that gospel, and the more I compare it with the other two

<sup>4</sup> Acts i. 3.

<sup>5</sup> Mark xvi. 19.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. E. A. Abbott suggests that the author of the fourth gospel consciously supplements the writers of the other gospels, and seeks to correct some passages.

Synoptists, the more I am impressed by its curious "stained glass" effect. What I mean is that, while every individual incident is beautiful, these incidents are stuck together with curiously little atmosphere or perspective, so that when comparing the account of any event in St. Matthew's gospel with the account in one of the others, it is impossible to guess why this or that has been expanded, contracted or omitted. And there is a strange air of timelessness, so that events really widely separated in time are narrated as if they followed, the one on the other, directly. Personally, I have never been able to find anything in the closing verses of St. Matthew to weaken my belief in the *Great Forty Days*, or in the *Ascension*.

(c) This objection is surely trivial. If a mist, such as often<sup>7</sup> floats on a mountain side, covered Christ for a moment, and then when it passed He was gone, or if He simply vanished out of the apostle's sight, and they could see that He had not walked away anywhere on the ground, which on all sides lay open to their eyes, there is nothing more natural than that they should "look stedfastly toward Heaven."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, whatever may have been the circumstances of His disappearance, if they expected Him to be received up, and if His last words were such as to convince them that He had, indeed, left them, their account of His going—which would become stereotyped on the lips of the Church—would be the same, and would be such as we find it in Holy Scripture.

(d) The final objection, namely, that those who to-day profess belief in the Ascension must hold a totally different view of it from that held by the early Church, may surely be met by a direct negative. The early Church believed that, at His Ascension, Christ passed out of the conditions of this life and this world, into the conditions of the life to come and of Heaven. And that is what I believe. It is true that they inevitably thought of Heaven as a place in space, above the firmament, and that I, as a post-Kantian, think of Heaven as outside Time and Space. But that difference of view has little effect on the religious significance

<sup>7</sup> Acts i. 9.

<sup>8</sup> Acts i. 10.



and value of belief in the Ascension. And what difference has been made is all in our favour, for our view of the Ascension, which sees in it a radical alteration of the condition of our Lord's life and manner of working, must be more fruitful than a view which sees in the Ascension little more than a passage from one point in space, below the firmament, to another point in space, above the firmament.

The last sentence brings us face to face with the question, Why was it expedient for us that Christ should go away? The answer is a twofold one, and is concerned with ( $\alpha$ ) His Eternal Priesthood in Heaven, and ( $\beta$ ) the Mission of the Comforter. Let us look briefly at each of these aspects:—

( $\alpha$ ) The doctrine of the Eternal Priesthood of Christ, which is, of course, closely connected with "ministerial priesthood," *i.e.* the priestly character of some men, and with the "priesthood of the laity," *i.e.* the share that we all have in Christ's priesthood, rests chiefly on the teaching of the Epistle to the Hebrews. In Jesus "we have a great High Priest that is passed into the Heavens."<sup>9</sup> But "every High Priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices; wherefore it is of necessity that this Man have somewhat also to offer."<sup>10</sup> And we have seen what it is that He offers. It is the only thing that God can desire or accept from man; or that man can offer or withhold from God. It is the complete and loving obedience and surrender of a human nature perfect, sinless and sanctified. This, which He offered at every moment of His earthly life, and of which the final and complete surrender was made at Calvary, is still what He offers. We may say, with Charles Wesley:—

O Thou, before the world began,  
Ordain'd a sacrifice for man,  
And by th' Eternal Spirit made  
An Offering in the sinner's stead;  
Our everlasting Priest art Thou,  
Pleading Thy Death for sinners now.

<sup>9</sup> Heb. iv. 14.

<sup>10</sup> Heb. viii. 3.

Thy Offering still continues new  
 Before the Righteous Father's view ;  
 Thyself the Lamb for ever slain,  
 Thy Priesthood doth unchanged remain ;  
 Thy years, O God, can never fail,  
 Nor Thy blest work within the veil.

But this high-priestly work of Christ's is not a work in which we have no part. In a church, when the Eucharist is being celebrated, the Priest stands at the Altar, and the congregation kneels below on the floor. Yet what he offers to God is their offering too. They *assist* at the offering, and while he and they unite themselves to that timeless and eternal Sacrifice in Heaven, making "a continual remembrance of the death of Christ,"<sup>11</sup> they also "offer and present unto Him themselves, their souls and bodies, to be a reasonable, holy and lively sacrifice." And while He thus "ever liveth to make intercession for them," their prayers go up with His, being offered to God "through Jesus Christ our Lord."

There are, of course, some people who deny that there are any priests under the Christian dispensation. This surely is to misunderstand our relation to Christ. Ought we not rather to argue that since we are all "the Body of Christ, and members in particular,"<sup>12</sup> and since He is Prophet, Priest and King, we, too, must all partake of his prophetic, priestly and royal character, so as to be, everyone of us, "kings and priests unto God and His Father"<sup>13</sup>; yet since His Body is a true body, in which all the members have not the same office, therefore neither the priestly, the ruling, the teaching, the healing, nor any other function will be performed by all the members indiscriminately.

(β) Turning from the subject of Christ's Eternal Priesthood, and man's ministerial priesthood, to that of the Mission of the Comforter, the sending down, that is, of the Holy Spirit, we can at once see why it was expedient that Christ should go away. When He took Human Nature He took it for ever, never to be laid aside. So then, if and when He appeared within the conditions of Time and

<sup>11</sup> Church Catechism.

<sup>12</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 27.

<sup>13</sup> Rev. i. 6.

Space, He was, and always must be, subject to those conditions. But the most obvious of those conditions is that no human being can be in two different places at one and the same time. And this, we may believe, was true for the Risen Christ, in His spiritual body, as much as for Jesus of Nazareth in the days of His sojourn on earth. There is no reason to suppose, there would seem to be excellent reasons for disbelieving, that the Risen Christ could appear *at one and the same moment* to the two disciples on the road to Emmaus and to the apostles in the Upper Room.

But after His Ascension He was released from the conditions of Time and Space. The life, the power, which was, so to speak, shut up in the Man Christ Jesus, the life and power which was nothing less than "the fulness of the Godhead, bodily,"<sup>14</sup> is now released and can be broadcasted through the universe. The corn of wheat has fallen into the earth, and died, and brought forth much fruit.<sup>15</sup> Consider this analogy. In the tiny grain of wheat there is shut up, and confined, all the life, all the energy, necessary to produce an entire wheaten plant, root, stem, leaves, ear. But the life and energy must be released by the death and decay of the grain of wheat. And Jesus must die, and His earthly body must give place to a glorified resurrection body, and the conditions of Time and Space must give place to those of Heaven, before the Spirit of Jesus is set free to work in the universe.

If we ask what that work is which the Holy Spirit does, we can answer in a sentence. It is to re-create the universe. He, the Creative Spirit, the Doer of all that God does, Who in the beginning created the universe, Who, when human nature was broken and corrupted by the Fall, brought into being a new humanity, the Second Adam Who was "conceived of the Holy Ghost," He, I say, the Creative Spirit, is now re-creating the universe. And the task will not be complete till He that sitteth on the throne can say, "The former things are passed away . . . Behold, I make all things new."<sup>16</sup> This entire doing away of the old and replacing of it by the new is not confined to man—though

<sup>14</sup> Col. ii. 9.<sup>15</sup> John xii. 24.<sup>16</sup> Rev. xxi. 4-5.

the redeemed man consciously enjoys it, and can say, "I live, yet not I, Christ liveth in me" <sup>17</sup>—but will be effected in the entire universe. For a broken and shattered universe will come to completeness and unity in Christ. For the promise is, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in Heaven, and which are in earth; even in Him in Whom also we have obtained an inheritance." <sup>18</sup> Indeed, God's plan for the universe, the Macrocosm, is strictly analogous to, and of one piece with, His plan for man, the microcosm. And the latter is summed up in the prayer in the Baptism Service, "that the old Adam may be so buried in this child that the new man may be raised up in him." Now in this work there are two agents—God's grace and man's faith. God's grace is the creative power of the Holy Ghost raising up in us the perfect humanity of Jesus. (See Galatians iv. 19, and many parallel passages). Man's faith is something far more than mere intellectual assent. It is the whole of man's nature stretching out to Christ; the intellect recognizes Christ for what He is; the emotions love Him for being what He is; the will chooses Him as Saviour and Lord. For saving faith, which can save the whole man, is the response of the whole man, through every faculty of his nature, to the appeal of God.

And as in this process there are two agents, grace and faith, so there are also two stages, regeneration and sanctification. Following St. Paul we may illustrate regeneration by grafting. A wild crab-apple tree will remain a wild crab no matter how much you prune it, dig about it, and manure it. Only by grafting it with a shoot from a good apple tree can its nature be changed. You must, that is to say, introduce into it the germs of a new nature which will replace the old. So, too, the nature of unregenerate man cannot be changed by education, training or any other process. The Holy Spirit must introduce into him the germs of a new nature (2 Cor. v. 17). This new life can only work and come to perfection with our consent. But it is, nevertheless, wholly God's work. Regeneration is but

<sup>17</sup> Gal. ii. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Eph. i. 10 and 11.

the beginning of a process, and that process is Sanctification, the utter doing away of the old and building up of the new. Here I have found an illustration useful. Readers of Goethe's beautiful autobiography, *Poetry and Truth*, will remember how his father wished to pull down the old house in Frankfort in which the poet was born. But, had he done so, the regulations of the city council would have compelled him to put it farther back from the road. This he was unwilling to do. So, instead of pulling it down, he remodelled it piecemeal. First he propped up the upper stories and totally rebuilt the ground floor portion. Then he propped up the upper stories and rebuilt the first floor. Then he propped up the higher stories and remodelled the second floor. And at last he removed the roof and finished the whole top of the house. At no moment could any civic authority say, "This is a new house. It was not here yesterday." Yet at the end no stone, brick or timber of the old house remained. Old things were passed away; all was become new. So it is with the sanctified man. At no moment can anyone say—"Here is a new man. He is not the same as he was yesterday." Yet at the end there is a new man, and he, with St. Paul, can, as I have said, use the daring paradox and say, "It is no longer I that live. Christ liveth in me."

Now all this is the work of the Holy Spirit, Who takes of the things of Christ and shows them unto us,<sup>19</sup> working in co-operation with man's faith. And I am sure that the Sacraments are God's appointed means. But I must declare also my conviction that God is greater than His means, and often works outside His own channels. I have met unbaptized men and women who, I am sure, had had the "Baptism of the Spirit." I should have liked to say, "Can any man forbid water that these may be baptized, who have received the Holy Ghost as well as we?"<sup>20</sup> I have known Quakers, and others, who never received the Holy Communion. But no one could have failed to see that Christ was formed in them. I think it is a pity to refuse God's own appointed means. I think all men would be wise to take the words of Holy Scripture, "Go . . .

<sup>19</sup> John xvi. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Acts x. 47.



teach all nations . . . baptizing them,"<sup>21</sup> and "This do in remembrance of Me," quite literally. But I am sure God's great plan of redemption works even apart from sacramental means.

I have just spoken of "God's great plan of redemption." I cannot end this book without saying one thing more. Cannot we discern something of God's whole plan of creation? God, Who is Love, desired, we may believe, to share His own life of perfect bliss with others. For perfect bliss can only be increased by being shared by a greater number of conscious beings. So God, desiring to "cultivate an infinite number of souls," created man. But only a free moral being is capable of sharing the life of God. And so the *possibility of a Fall* was a necessity, though not the Fall itself. I mean (and the distinction is familiar to all theologians) it was a necessary part of God's plan that man should be a being capable of falling. It was no part of His plan that man should fall. But, when the race had fallen, He, in His infinite love, "doth devise means that His banished be not expelled from Him."<sup>22</sup> And in the end God's will for our race will be accomplished and an infinite number of souls will share the perfect bliss of God. Even here, on earth, each person, each centre of consciousness, is a potential centre of joy. I do not enjoy an experience less because millions have enjoyed it before.

I am sure what I feel, others have felt ;  
 And all that I know, others have known ;  
 And yet the joy of what I feel,  
 And what I know, is all my own.

And so it always must have been,  
 And so it shall be ever more ;  
 Nothing is dull, nothing worn out,  
 Though done so many times before.

The happy boy who loves a girl,  
 And woos and wins her for his own,  
 Is certain that his love is such  
 As no man else has ever known.

<sup>21</sup> Matt. xxviii. 19.

<sup>22</sup> 2 Sam. xiv. 14.



The mother, when her child is born,  
Looks at it with amazed delight,  
And thinks the whole wide world should pause  
To see so wonderful a sight.

Even the thrush upon the bough  
Sings his old songs in such a way,  
You feel he thinks them all his own,  
Freshly composed this very day.

I think it was God's boundless love  
Made Him create a world like this,  
That so a million million lives  
Might share, and multiply, His bliss.

For as each little muddy pool  
Mirrors the whole wide heaven above,  
So every single living thing  
Reflects God's life of joy and love.

For God is Life, the only true eternal life, and that life shall be ours, the inheritance and possession of every separate "centre of consciousness" or soul, when "they all shall be one, as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." <sup>23</sup>

<sup>23</sup> John xvii. 21.



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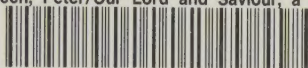
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